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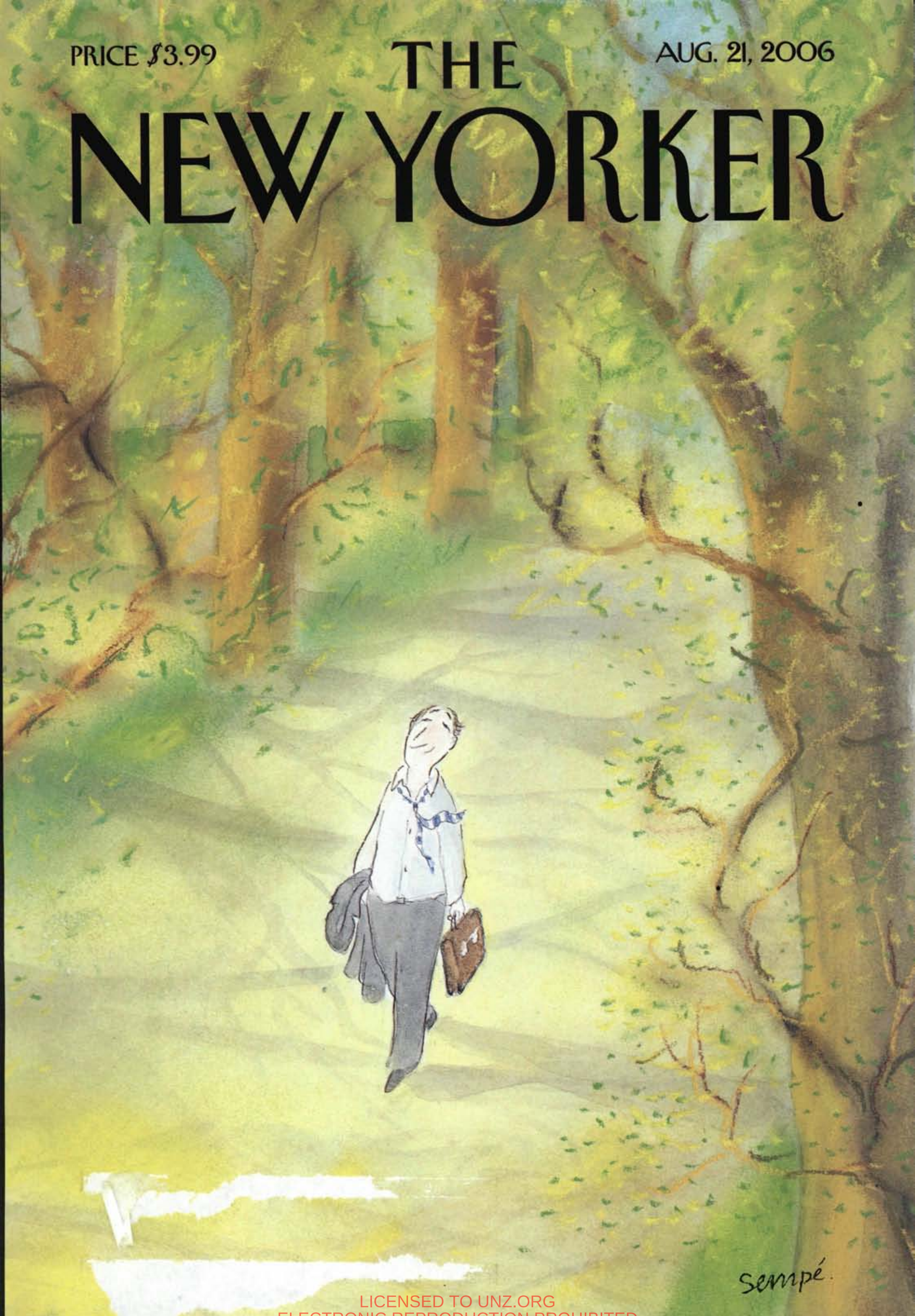
THE NEW YORKER

AUG. 21, 2006



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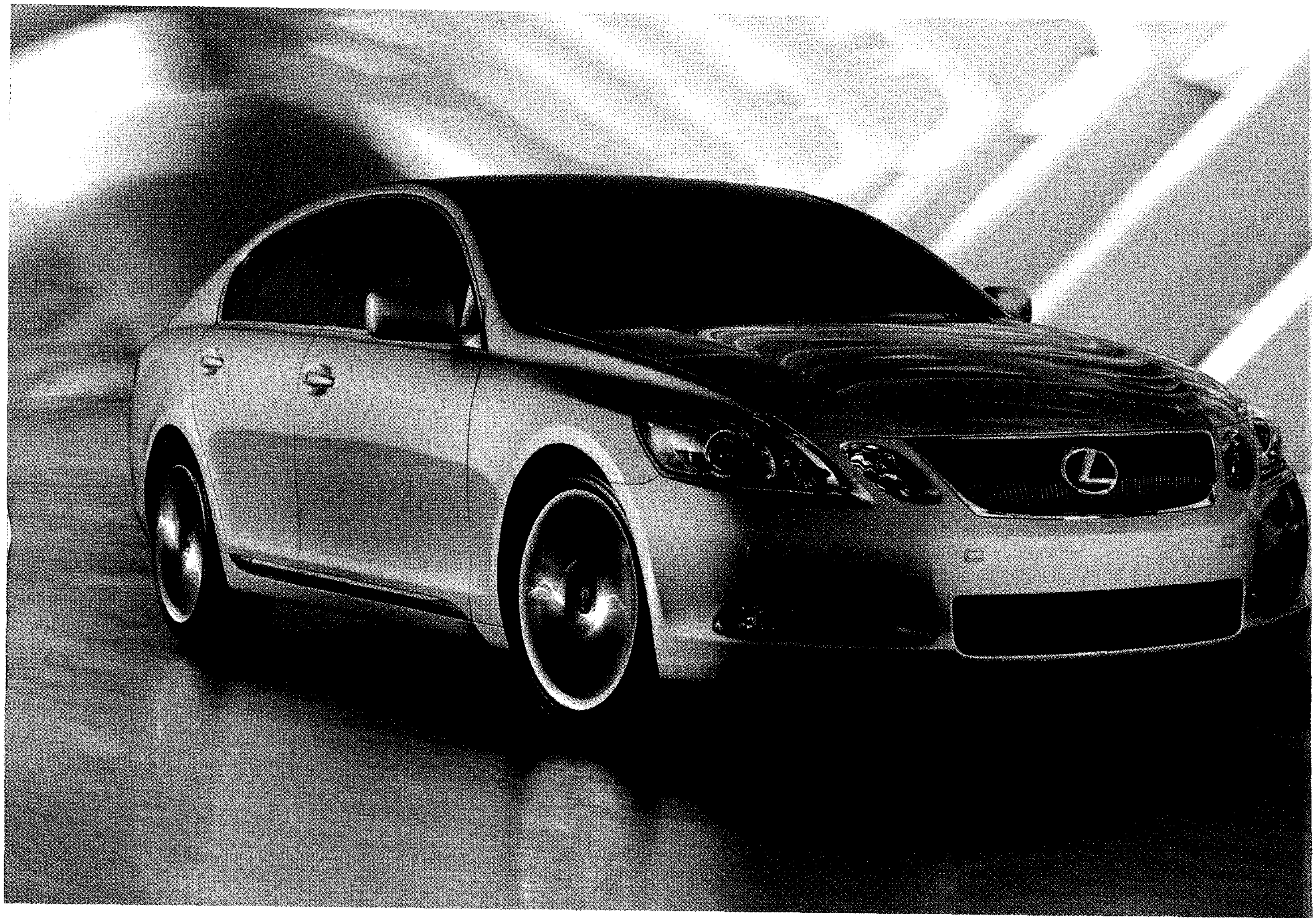

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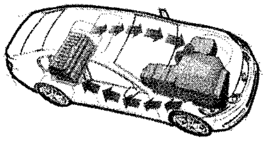

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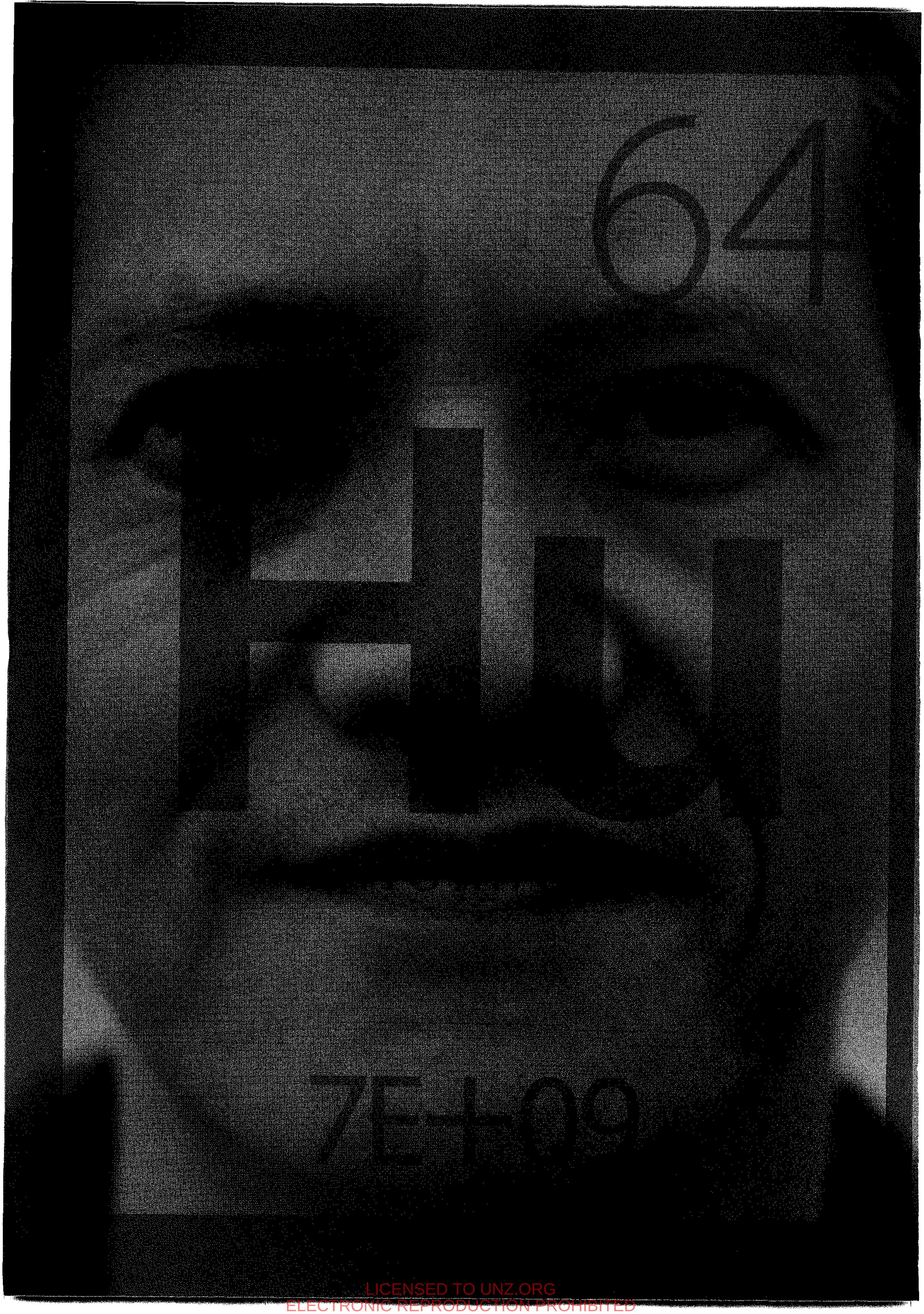
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CONTRIBUTORS

Seymour M. Hersh ("Watching Lebanon," p. 28) has been contributing to the magazine since 1971. He has written eight books, including "Chain of Command," which is available in paperback.

Christopher Buckley (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 34) has a new humor book, "Boomsday," coming out in the spring.

William Finnegan ("Blank Monday," p. 36) is the author of several books, including "Cold New World" and "A Complicated War."

Dan Baum ("The Lost Year," p. 44) is a staff writer. His piece on the New Orleans police was published in the magazine in January.

Robert Polidori (Photographs, pp. 44, 50) will have a solo exhibition of his New Orleans photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in September.

Nick Paumgarten (The Talk of the Town, p. 25) is a staff writer.

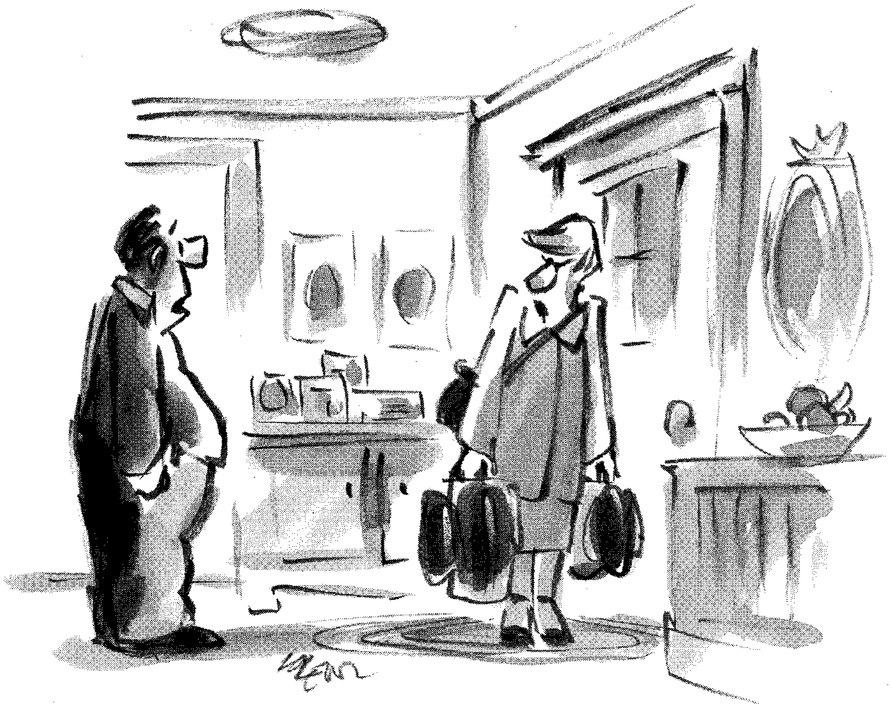
Justin Davidson ("Measure for Measure," p. 60), who won a Pulitzer Prize for criticism in 2002, is the classical-music and architecture critic for *Newsday.*

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (Poem, p. 41) was awarded the 1970 Nobel Prize in Literature. "The Solzhenitsyn Reader: New and Essential Writings, 1947-2005," will be published in November. "Prisoner's Right" was written in a labor camp in 1951 and was first published in Russia in 1999.

David Means (Fiction, p. 70) is the author of three short-story collections, including "The Secret Goldfish."

Adam Kirsch (Books, p. 79) is the book critic of the New York *Sun.*

Joan Acocella (Dancing, p. 85) reviews dance and books for the magazine. A collection of her essays, "Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints," will be published early next year. ♦



"You can't leave, Alice—you're the only thing keeping me from quitting my job, taking up golf, and living off the equity in the house."

THE MAIL

CUBA AND THE U.S.

Jon Lee Anderson, writing on the current political situation in Cuba, refers to the "Five Heroes" who are currently serving prison terms in the United States ("Castro's Last Battle," July 31st). These men were arrested in Miami in September, 1998, for having penetrated—without force or harm to any individuals—South Florida's terrorist groups, in order to monitor their activities. During the summer of that year, the Cuban government had contacts with the White House through Gabriel García Márquez—the Nobel laureate has written a detailed account—and an F.B.I. delegation met with its counterparts in Havana. Despite the evidence concerning terrorist actions against Cuba, the Miami efforts went undisturbed, while the five Cubans were arrested and put on trial. Throughout the entire process—from their indictments to their sentencings—the U.S. did not contest that the Cubans' "crime" was to operate against violent groups tolerated by the Administration. The U.S. government requested and obtained a "special condition" to each of their sentences: "the defendant is prohibited from visiting specific places where individuals or groups such as terrorists . . . are known to be or frequent." Three months after September 11, 2001, in the heat of the "war on terror," the Bush Administration succeeded in protecting its own terrorists.

Ricardo Alarcón Quesada
President of Cuba's National Assembly
Havana, Cuba

Anderson refers to the Bush Administration's Committee for the Assistance to a Free Cuba in his piece on the future of the country after Castro. The very existence of such an entity should evoke an ominous sense of déjà vu in any political observer. The U.S. ought to realize that Cubans are prepared to manage the post-Castro transition, and that any change imposed from the outside will never be seen as legitimate. Instead, the commission's co-chair, Senator Mel Martinez, makes the laughable statement that "I looked for lessons from Iraq, for things the Cubans will need." As Anderson observes, the "special period" concessions to a freer economy, along with the advances Cuba has made in fields like health and biotechnology, have created a well-educated population that is demanding better societal conditions. Without the pressures and intrusions of U.S. policy, Cuba, while preserving the social gains of the revolution, could evolve into a tolerant society, with a mixed economy and a good standard of living. But that is impossible while the island is assailed by outside forces that curtail its commerce, foment internal unrest, and plan to privatize the economy. The machinations of the commission should be stopped right now; otherwise, we will add another shameful episode to the sorry history of U.S. imperialist adventures.

Ada Bello
Philadelphia, Pa.

CHANGING NAMES

Hendrik Hertzberg notes the phenomenon of dropping the "ic" from the Democratic Party's name, something that has driven me crazy for years (Comment, August 7th & 14th). I've seen it used in captions in the New York *Times* and even heard it coming out of the mouths of Democratic politicians. What the usage really does is remove any implication that the party name stands for values, whatever they might be. "Democrat" is a thing, including a member of the party; "Democratic" is an idea, or an argument, about life. The same would be true if "an" were removed from "Republican" in the same manner. "The Republic Party"—it sounds vaguely fascist, doesn't it? But it implies nothing.

Greil Marcus
Berkeley, Calif.

•

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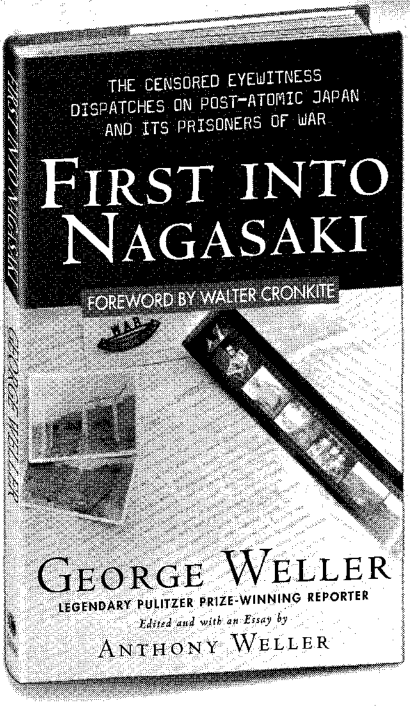
His first-hand reporting on the bomb's effects was blocked.

Now, for the first time, the secret's out.


THE CENSORED EYEWITNESS DISPATCHES ON POST-ATOMIC JAPAN AND ITS PRISONERS OF WAR
FIRST INTO NAGASAKI
FOREWORD BY WALTER CRONKITE
GEORGE WELLER
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Balkan Beat Box, at SummerStage. Photograph by Lauren Klain Carton.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
20	21	22	16	17	18	19

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
WISE GUY

The sly roots rocker Todd Snider, who plays two nights this week at the Canal Room, released one of last year's finest recordings, "East Nashville Skyline," and he's back with a new album, "The Devil You Know." Snider, who exhibits a fondness for misfits and heretics, isn't shy about his politics, though he wraps them in humor. One of the new album's best songs is told from the perspective of a fictional frat buddy of George W. Bush. (See page 11.)

ART
PHOTO-REALISM

Weegee, a workaholic wanderer with a golden eye, scoured the city, from Coney Island dive bars to the Metropolitan Opera House, in search of subjects for his vérité photographs. More than a hundred examples of his images are at the International Center of Photography through Aug. 27, in "Unknown Weegee." (See page 12.)

DANCE
MORRIS'S MOZART

The world première of "Mozart Dances," a new evening-length piece choreographed by the great Mark Morris—who is renowned for his musicality—and performed by the Mark Morris Dance Group, graces Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival. (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BEFORE THE FALL

The Metropolitan Opera, about to turn over a new leaf under the management of Peter Gelb, sticks to tradition this week by offering the first of several free "Met in the Parks" performances (including "La Traviata"). (See page 15.)

MOVIES
PACKING HEAT

Two eras of cinematic crime are in revival at Symphony Space. Fritz Lang's "The Big Heat," from 1953, stars Glenn Ford and is famous for the scene in which a sadistic mobster (Lee Marvin) throws scalding coffee in the face of his mistress (Gloria Grahame). And Martin Scorsese's "Mean Streets," from 1973, chronicles the lives of two brothers from Little Italy (Harvey Keitel and Robert De Niro). (See page 18.)

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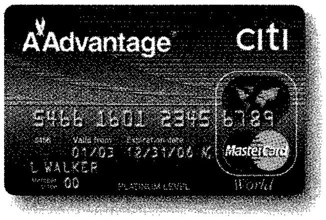

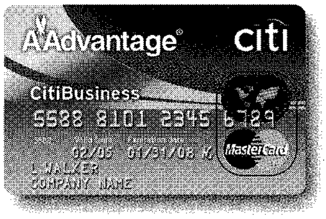

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BRUTALITY OF FACT
Stephanie Yankwitt directs a revival of Keith Reddin's black comedy about the decline of a troubled family, featuring Joy Franz. Previews begin Aug. 17. Opens Aug. 19. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE FANTASTICKS
The world's longest-running musical has returned, after a four-year hiatus. Written and directed by Tom Jones, with music by Harvey Schmidt. In previews. (Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100.)

MARTIN SHORT: FAME BECOMES ME
The comedian and "Saturday Night Live" alum stars in a mock-autobiographical musical, with original songs by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman (who also directs). Book by Short and Daniel Goldfarb, with additional material from Alan Zweibel. In previews. Opens Aug. 17. (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

MR. DOOLEY'S AMERICA
The Irish Repertory Theatre presents this comedy based on the turn-of-the-century newspaper columnist Finley Peter Dunne, who wrote social and political commentary in the guise of a fictitious Irish pub owner. Written by Philip Dunne and Martin Blaine. Opens Aug. 16. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN
Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline star in Bertolt Brecht's tale about a matriarch who loses several children to an ongoing war. This season's Shakespeare in the Park production features a new translation by Tony Kushner, with original songs by Jeanine Tesori. Directed by George C. Wolfe. In previews. Opens Aug. 21. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

SEVEN GUITARS
The first of three August Wilson plays to be produced by the Signature Theatre Company follows seven people struggling in Pittsburgh's Hill District in the late forties. Ruben Santiago-Hudson directs. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

NOW PLAYING

ABSINTHE
A burlesque circus show that incorporates a torch singer, acrobats, a contortionist, and a sword swallower, presented in a travelling Spiegeltent built in Belgium in the twenties. (Pier 17, South Street Seaport. 212-279-4200.)

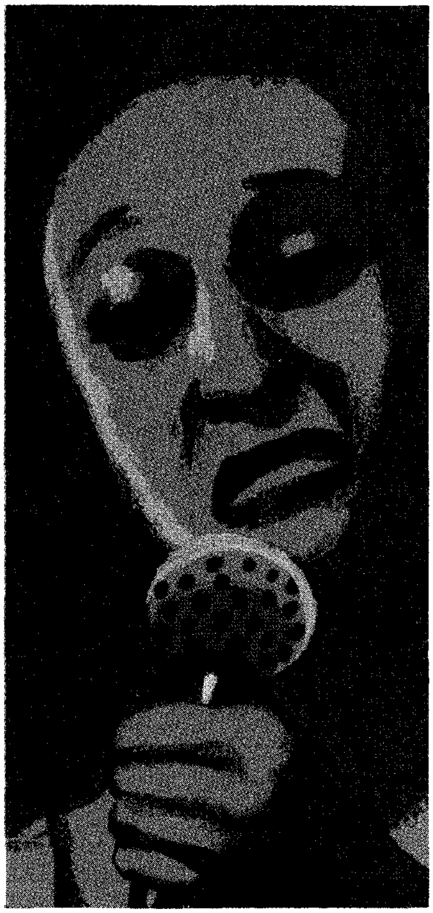
AMAJUBA: LIKE DOVES WE RISE
"Somewhere beneath the dust is the past, and until we go back and claim each broken piece we will never be free," Tshallo says; he is one of five vibrant actors who take turns sharing their stories of childhood adversity under apartheid in this moving and kinetic production from Johannesburg, created and directed by Yael Farber. Their goal may be exorcism, but the effect is more like exultation; the performance is as much a testament to spiritual strength as it is hard evidence of it. Dance and a-cappella singing, which play a large role in the piece, stand as powerful symbols of that force—greater than hunger or despair—which kept a generation of South Africans going through the worst of times. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100. Through Aug. 20.)

THE AMERICAN LIVING ROOM
This festival, presented by HERE Arts Center, showcases dozens of new works that incorporate theatre, dance, puppets, and video. (3LD Arts & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 212-868-4444.)

ANAÏS NIN: ONE OF HER LIVES
Wendy Beckett wrote and directs this biographical play, set in Paris in the thirties. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

CREATION: A CLOWN SHOW
Lucas Caleb Rooney's one-man clown show reinterprets the Book of Genesis. Orlando Pabotoy directs. (Theatre Five, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-868-4444.)

THE DISPUTE
The National Asian American Theatre Company presents Pierre Marivaux's eighteenth-century romantic comedy, in which two men and two women are observed by a prince and his court to see who will sin first. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)


Bettye LaVette, at Lincoln Center.

IGORT

EVENSONG
Mary Gage based her play on interviews with octogenarians living in Michigan. Lewis Magruder directs. (TBG Arts Center, 312 W. 36th St. 212-352-3101.)

EVERYTHINGS TURNING INTO BEAUTIFUL
Seth Zvi Rosenfeld's decaffeinated play with music, presented by the New Group, finds Brenda (Daphne Rubin-Vega) and Sam (Malik Yoba), two songwriters and sometime collaborators, cooped up in her apartment in the middle of the night, where they get to talking about love, their art, and "the industry"; now and then, they take out their guitars and sing about it. For better or worse, they eventually decide to take their relationship to the next level, but it's not without an evening's worth of tortured self-analysis. Theirs is the kind of diary-entry introspection that never really involves the audience or gives momentum to the story. The play has a groove, but not much of a pulse. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

HENRIK IBSEN + JON FOSSE: NORWAY MEETS NEW YORK
Oslo Elsewhere presents English translations of "Rosmersholm," by Ibsen, and "Deathvariations," by Fosse. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

INDIAN BLOOD
Primary Stages presents the world première of a new comedy by A. R. Gurney, about a young man who uses his Native American ancestry as justification for his defiant behavior. Mark Lamos directs. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

KIKI & HERB: ALIVE ON BROADWAY
Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman bring their fabulous mock-cabaret act to Broadway. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

MARCO MILLIONS (BASED ON LIES)
Tom Ridgely directs this drama adapted from Eugene O'Neill's play about the travels of Marco Polo. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
The tenth annual celebration of downtown theatre includes more than two hundred shows at twenty-one venues. Highlights include the Rude Mechanicals' political drama "I Coulda Been a Kennedy"; "The Fartiste," Charlie Shulman and Michael Roberts's considered evocation of the life and times of Joseph Pujol, the nineteenth-century Paris-based artist who made music through his anus; and Catherine Capellaro and Andrew Rohn's big-business musical satire, "Walmartopia." (212-279-4488. For complete schedule, visit www.fringenyc.org.)

SHOUT! THE MOD MUSICAL
Is it possible for an entire decade to roll over in its grave? This question arrives via Phillip George and David Lowenstein's generic and terminally innocuous sixties-pop revue, which cheerfully lobotomizes both the era and its music. Five actresses, color-coded to match the hues of the "mod rainbow," take turns covering the songs of Petula Clark, Dusty Springfield, and the like, punctuating the music with "Laugh-In"-esque badinage meant to bring us back to the days of swinging London. But it's more like being trapped in a late-night infomercial for a compilation-disk set. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

A STONE CARVER
A sentimental case study of eminent domain, written by William Mastrosimone and starring Dan Lauria (who played the dad in "The Wonder Years") as Agostino, an Old World lug who, when bulldozers arrive at his home to clear a path for a highway off-ramp, refuses to leave, despite the pleas of his son, Raff (Jim Iorio). Raff's new, buttoned-up fiancée (Elizabeth Rossa) is also there, giving rise to a meet-the-parents scenario that only emphasizes the broadness of Lauria's character: with his cap and overalls and "I picka da tomatoes" approximation of a Sicilian accent, he brings to mind not so much a beloved relative as a lost Mario Brother. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.)

OUT OF TOWN

BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
Wendy Wasserstein's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "The Heidi Chronicles," in previews, opens Aug. 18. At the intimate Unicorn Theatre, "The Pilgrim Papers" continues its run. (Stockbridge, Mass. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
Terrence O'Brien directs "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and Gia Forakis directs "The Rivals." (Garrison, N.Y. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
At the Main Stage, Rick Elice and Roger Rees's "Double Double" opens Aug. 16. At the Nikos Stage, "The Opposite of Sex," a musical based on the movie by Don Roos, closes Aug. 20. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **THE HISTORY BOYS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **JACQUES BREL IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN PARIS:** Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245

W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LIEUTENANT OF INISHMORE:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **NO CHILD . . .:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **PIG FARM:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **SWEENEY TODD:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **[TITLE OF SHOW]:** Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-279-4200. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

"AMSTERJAM"
Now in its second year, this outdoor festival presents artists from a variety of genres who will perform on their own and then together to form live "mashups." **Tom Petty** and the **Foo Fighters** (see also the Beacon Theatre) hold down the rock corner, while **LL Cool J** and **Busta Rhymes** bring the rap. With the high-voltage Afro-Cuban rhythms of the New York City collective **Yerba Buena.** (Randall's Island. 212-307-7171. Aug. 19.)

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Aug. 14-16: Delaware's finest slide guitarist, **George Thorogood,** swaggers into town, backed by his Destroyers, in celebration of pool-hustling tough guys with large capacities for alcohol and soft spots for the ladies.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 17: The suave crooner **Chris Isaak** has a voice that gleams like the chrome bumper on a restored muscle car, and his songs have a restless rockabilly backbone and a timeless grace. Though he hasn't managed another hit with as seismic an impact as his hauntingly Orbisonesque single, "Wicked Game," from 1989, Isaak has continued to release solid albums. At the moment, he's promoting his first greatest-hits collection. Aug. 21: The normally hard-rocking **Foo Fighters,** who are led by Dave Grohl, the former Nirvana drummer and versatile gun for hire, reveal their softer side with an acoustic show.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 17: The **Loser's Lounge,** the ad-hoc ensemble led by the keyboardist Joe McGinty and known for affectionate sendups of pop-culture figures, turns its attention to two bands from the early eighties, the Cure and the Smiths. Aug. 22: **Raul Malo,** the former leader of the beloved country-rock band the Mavericks, recently released a new solo album, "You're Only Lonely." Packed with glossy arrangements of pop and jazz standards (including Etta James's signature song, "At Last"), it is confounding fans of Malo's more heated Southern fare. In concert, though, Malo's super-smooth voice and consummate showmanship are sure to prevail.

CAKESHOP
152 Ludlow St. (212-253-0036)—Aug. 18: **They Shoot Horses, Don't They?** hail from Vancouver and could easily make you think that there's something wonderful in the water up north. The group, which earlier this year released its début album, "Boo Hoo Hoo Boo," tosses together horns, keyboards, guitar, percussion, and off-the-wall lyrics to make joyful exhortations to dance. With the **Art of Shooting,** an aggressive and artsy local band with experimentalist tendencies.

CANAL ROOM
285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—Aug. 15-16: The eccentric singer-songwriter **Todd Snider** infuses his songs with candor, wit, and charm, connecting him to a line of accomplished folk-troubadour forebears such as Kris Kristofferson, John Prine, and Billy Joe Shaver. Snider's new album, "The Devil You Know," has a healthy dose of acoustic-guitar picking, but it also rocks. And Snider has his own take on old themes: "Lookin' for a Job" updates the "Take This Job and Shove It" sentiment by replacing David Allan Coe's angry approach with a Zen-like awareness that leads the song's hero to tell his new boss, "Watch what you say to someone with nothing / It's almost like having it all."

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—Aug. 17: The celebrated hip-hop duo **Gnarls Barkley** performs a benefit show.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Aug. 16: **Jurassic 5** came out of the early-nineties Los Angeles underground hip-hop scene with the get-loose sound of a jamming block party. Their new album, "Feedback," features production work by some of the top names in the business, including Scott Storch and Salaam Remi, in a bid to bring their positive message to the masses.

JONES BEACH
Wantagh, N.Y. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 19: The well-intentioned Omaha quintet **311** made a sizable splash in the nineties by creating a hybrid of rap, metal, and reggae that appealed to surfers as well as fraternity brothers. Aug. 22: **Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.** The post-folk supergroup returns, mixing four-part harmonies and protest music. They have their vast back catalogue to draw on, along with new songs from Neil Young's latest album, "Living with War."

LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS
This annual festival, now in its thirty-sixth year, fills the plazas around the Upper West Side cultural institution with free concerts and performances. Aug. 18: A night of blues, R. & B., and jazz, with a big lineup that includes **Guy Davis,** the guitarist, singer, and son of the actors and writers Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, who has dedicated his life to the rural blues; the veteran soul singer **Bettye LaVette,** who can deliver a heartbroken wail through a whisper or make a slow ballad pulse like scorching gospel rock; and the bandleader **Chico Hamilton,** who will be joined by the bassist **Buster Williams.** Aug. 19-20: The annual Roots of American Music Festival features two days of music, capped on the first night by the soul icons **Eddie Floyd** ("Knock on Wood") and **Percy Sledge** ("When a Man Loves a Woman") and by **Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives,** the legendary gospel and soul singer **Mavis Staples,** and others on the second. (For complete schedule, visit www.lincolncenter.org. Through Aug. 27.)

MCCARREN PARK POOL
Lorimer St. between Bayard St. and Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (212-307-7171)—Aug. 17: **Iron & Wine** is Samuel Beam, a fine acoustic guitarist with a fiercely bushy beard. He delivers his revivalist songs in a breathy, hushed voice.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 16: Henry Rollins returns to New York with a mostly original version of his **Rollins Band** for the first time in nine years. From 1981 to 1986, the workaholic was the lead singer of Black Flag, the L.A. hardcore pioneers whose fierce sound and democratic approach influenced their generation nearly as much as Bob Dylan did his. Nowadays, Rollins splits his time between writing books, hosting a talk show on the Independent Film Channel, dropping in on American troops for the U.S.O., and running his own publishing company, 2.13.61 (named for his birthday). But for anyone who has seen him kneeling on the stage, screaming his self-loathing lyrics over his band's ferocious riffs, it's pretty clear that being the front man is what he does best. Sharing the bill are the rockabilly-tinged punkers of the equally influential **X.**

PETE'S CANDY STORE
709 Lorimer St., Brooklyn (718-302-3770)—Aug. 18: **Adam Levy,** a busy local guitarist who's played with everyone from Tracy Chapman to Norah Jones to Sex Mob, is here on Fridays this month. The acts later that night include **Matt Curreri,** a clever and unkempt songwriter whose catchy rock-and-roll tunes capture the warm joys and cold sweats of one's twenties.

SPIEGELTENT
Pier 17, South Street Seaport (212-279-4200)—This newly installed mirrored tent has a rich history; Marlene Dietrich may or may not have once graced its stage. This month, and into the fall, it is home to the

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
GREAT OUTDOORS

Whenever I attend one of the outdoor dance performances so plentiful in New York in the summer, I think, This is what they're always telling us dance shows were like in Indian villages, so human and holistic. In other words, people come late and eat and talk and bring small children. The children drop Popsicles into their laps and scream. Old people, too, are in heavy attendance, and, in keeping with their hearing level, they bellow at each other ("PASS THE PEANUTS!"). Even if they weren't there, the very air makes a noise. But maybe you are an old person, or a person with children. Or perhaps you would just like to see, for free, some dance that will run you forty dollars a ticket when it's given indoors. On Aug. 16, as part of the Lincoln Center Out of Doors series, the Martha Graham Dance Company will bring its tremendous "Sketches from Chronicle" to the Damrosch Park Band Shell. Aug. 25-26, Garth Fagan Dance will appear, with its megawatt performers. Treat these shows as if you were an Indian villager. Take the kids, the sandwiches, your aunt, and go home when you feel like it.

—*Joan Acocella*

STEPHEN KRONINGER

show "Absinthe" (see The Theatre) as well as a number of concerts. Aug. 17 and Thursdays this month: **Diamanda Galás.** Specializing in music that can be as jarring as it is uncompromising, the dark avant-garde chanteuse, who can smoothly croon and hellishly exhort in equal measure, eschews the notion that music should simply entertain. Galás rarely fails to make an indelible impression, whether exhuming old blues standards or wailing for the unjustly deceased. Aug. 17: The vocalists **Duncan Sheik** and **Vienna Teng.** Aug. 22: The singer-songwriter **Richard Julian,** who counts Randy Newman among his fans.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Ol' Dirty Bastard (O.D.B.), one of the most charismatic rappers in the game and a founding member of the **Wu-Tang Clan,** was working on a comeback album a little over a year ago when he collapsed in the studio and died. The surviving members of the Clan—GZA/Genius, Method Man, Ghostface Killa, Raekwon, RZA, U-God, Inspectah Deck, and Masta Killa—pay tribute on Aug. 17-18.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—**Toshiko Akiyoshi,** having retired her pioneering big band, returns to her first love, bebop piano. She's here with a trio Aug. 16-19.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Aug. 15-20: The bassist **Charlie Haden** often wears his heart on his sleeve, and few of his bands are as unabashedly romantic as Quartet West, which invests blues, ballads, and bebop with equal amounts of distilled lyricism. Integral group members include the stirring saxophonist **Ernie Watts** and the pianist **Alan Broadbent.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Aug. 15-20: The **Cedar Walton** quartet, with **Vincent Herring.** Decorous bop piano meets impassioned bop saxophone. Walton, a respected keyboard veteran noted for his work with Art Blakey in the mid-sixties, brings a world of experience and his superior compositions to the table. Herring has fervor and increasing maturity as a modernist improviser on his side.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Aug. 17-20: The jazz trumpeter **Charles Tolliver,** back in the game after decades of obscurity, appears at the helm of a big band whose revolving ranks are stocked with both vital veterans and young players. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Aug. 17-20: An unexpected but immensely promising new trio brings together the violinist **Jenny Scheinman,** the young iconoclastic piano player **Jason Moran,** and the ever-adventurous musical patriarch **Paul Motian,** on drums.

KITANO
Park Ave. at 38th St. (212-885-7000)—Aug. 18-19: The midtown hotel features **David Hazeltine,** a masterful pianist known for his hip arrangements and long, lyrical phrases. His quartet includes the brazen alto player **Mike DiRubbo.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Aug. 15-20: **David Sánchez,** a tenor saxophonist with a passionate sound and a penchant for Latin rhythms, leads a quartet featuring the pianist **Edsel Gomez.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Raphael at the Metropolitan: The Colonna Altarpiece."** Through Sept. 4. ♦ **"Girodet: Romantic Rebel."** Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"On Photography: A Tribute to Susan Sontag."** Through Sept. 4. ♦ **"Treasures of Sacred Maya Kings."** Through Sept. 10. ♦ **"Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument."** This summer, the roof garden is home to four sculptural works by the Chinese-born artist. Among them are "Clear Sky Black Cloud," a timed gunpowder explosion that produces a small cloud of smoke over Central Park each day at noon. Through Oct. 29. ♦ **"Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings and Prints."** Through Oct. 15. ♦ The Met's English period rooms have been filled with mannequins in costumes old and new for **"AngloMania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion,"** transforming them into elaborate surreal tableaux. A lady in a pink silk court gown climbs a staircase while maids in shredded Hussein Chalayan cocktail dresses scrub the floors below; a pair of attendants, one in a sober black dress once worn by Queen Victoria, the other in Alexander McQueen and Shaun Leane's sparkly sheath and aluminum spine-corset, stand over the deathbed of a man in red plaid McQueen pants. Mods mingle with dandies at a hunt ball, punks mix it up with dames in a drawing room, and the show as a whole conveys the interconnectedness and the bizarreness of both class and fashion. Through Sept. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

THE CLOISTERS
Fort Tryon Park (212-923-3700)—There are still some stained-glass panels to be installed in the mullioned windows of the Cloisters' newly renovated Early Gothic galleries, which teem with French, Italian, German, Austrian, Spanish, and Flemish objects. They will doubtless be as beautiful as those already there, but one hopes they won't completely veil the equally exalted view of the Hudson River and its bluffs. Seraphic wood and stone Madonnas, earnest angels, and a thoughtful painted Christ emerging from the tomb gaze out across the water or look inward, through an open door that leads to a fountain in a lushly greened courtyard filled with birdsong. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Dada,"** a large and illuminating survey of the anti-art movement that countered despair with absurdity. Through Sept. 11. ♦ **"Douglas Gordon: Timeline"** includes the artist's most famous work, the glacially paced "24 Hour *Psycho*." Through Sept. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"No Limits, Just Edges: Jackson Pollock Paintings on Paper."** Through Sept. 29. ♦ **"Zaha Hadid."** Through Oct. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Full House,"** the Whitney's seventy-fifth-anniversary extravaganza, includes a floor devoted entirely to the works of Edward Hopper. Through Sept. 3. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Graffiti,"** a survey of the urban art form. Through Sept. 3. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Unknown Weegee."** Weegee, the tabloid news photographer who understood his medium, his audience, and the importance of self-promotion better than any of his peers, is an inexhaustible source of cheap sensation and genuine drama. This terrific show of more than a hundred lesser-known and previously unexhibited pictures, most from his heyday in the nineteen-forties, reconfirms his importance not just as a recorder of the New York scene at its seamiest but as an ace newsman. Among the vintage prints

DVD NOTES
SMOOTH OPERATOR

The four feature films that Eric Rohmer directed between 1966 and 1972, "La Collectionneuse," "My Night at Maud's," "Claire's Knee," and "Love in the Afternoon," brought him international renown, based largely on their misinterpretation as placid, cerebral diversions. A new boxed set of Rohmer's "Six Moral Tales" (Criterion), which includes these four features, a remarkable brace of short films, and fascinating printed extras, suggests that the misunderstanding has occurred strictly according to plan.

Rohmer was born Jean-Marie Maurice Schérer in 1920, and took his alias for his film-related work in 1950 at the Ciné-Club of the Latin Quarter, a crucial breeding ground for the French New Wave. Just as Schérer's life was taken over by his pseudonymous career, his films' distinctive style came to usurp their substance. Though Rohmer shows intelligent people behaving—and, above all, talking—with reasoned refinement, he hides an inner world of violently raging desires beneath his characters' intellectual games. In effect, Rohmer is a secret Sadean, a Surrealist manqué.

The first shots of "La Collectionneuse" suggest the frenzy at the core of Rohmer's art: closeups of the bikini-clad body of the adolescent Haydée Politoff, the man-collector of the title. Yet the film's sunlit, Impressionist beachside images mask its inner turbulence, just as the sophisticated artistic and psychological discussions of the two men (Daniel Pommereulle and Patrick Bauchau) who compete for Haydée's favors conceal the perverse carnal jousting that gives rise to them.

In Rohmer's films, elegant philosophical dialogue alternately sublimates, justifies, and arouses sexual desire. In "Claire's Knee," Jérôme, a dark-bearded, middle-aged, aristocratic diplomat (Jean-Claude Brialy) who is engaged to be married—and who has already planted a lingering kiss on the lips of one teen-aged girl (Béatrice Romand)—halts his caresses at the knee of her stepsister, the porcelain-blond Claire (Laurence de Monaghan). Rohmer's precise and restrained images maintain a surface tension that suggests with the merest tremors Jérôme's underlying emotional chaos and registers infinitesimal gestures as events of vast psychic and dramatic moment.

Each of the "Six Moral Tales" tells the same story in different guises: a man is tempted by an inauthentic passion that threatens to distract him from the uncertain pursuit of a true love. In Rohmer's world, love is a tenuous faith that is constantly being tested by the pressure of wild desires. In his genteel, reticent films, Rohmer reveals more of his reckless inner life than many famously confessional artists would dare.

—*Richard Brody*

here (many captioned with his hasty scrawl) are pictures of Harlem riots, Bowery missions, accident victims, strippers, murderers, countless insatiable crowds, and a thirty-five-dollar check stub from Time, Inc., succinctly marked "two murders." Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Atta Kim: On-Air."** Large-scale photographs by the Korean artist, who was born in 1956. Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Tempo, Tempo! The Bauhaus Photomontages of Marianne Brandt."** Through Aug. 27. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Eva Hesse: Sculpture."** Through Sept. 17. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 9, and Fridays, 11 to 3. For the duration of the Hesse show, the museum will also be open on Saturdays, from 11 to 5:45, with no charge for admission.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"The High Style of Dorothy Draper."** Through Oct. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)— **"Gustav Klimt: Five Paintings from the Collection of Ferdinand and Adele Bloch-Bauer"** includes the 1907 gold-and-silver-laced portrait of Adele, which will be joining the Neue Galerie's permanent collection. Through Sept. 18. (Open Thursdays and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NOGUCHI MUSEUM
9-01 33rd Rd., at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-204-7088)—**"Best of Friends: R. Buckminster Fuller and Isamu Noguchi."** Through Oct. 15. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM
12 Fulton St., at Water St. (212-748-8600)—Eugeen Van Mieghem's life (1875-1930) coincided with the busiest years of the Red Star shipping line, and his parents owned an inn in Antwerp near the firm's warehouses. As an artist, he was thus uniquely placed to observe the Eastern Europeans who thronged to the Belgian quays on their way to Ellis Island and beyond. **"Antwerp=America: Eugeen Van Mieghem and the Emigrants of the Red Star Line"** showcases Van Mieghem's sombre, smoky paintings, enlivened here and there with a red cap or a babushka. There are also artifacts from the ships' cabins, advertising posters, and photographs of both fin-de-siècle Antwerp and shipboard life, including a young Albert Einstein in a deck chair and a motion-blurred shot of kids playing ring-around-the-rosy. Through Oct. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: Many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

"ON THE ROCKS AND OVER THE EDGE"
In an unusually dark and gritty show for the summer season, three black-and-white photographers from the nineteen-seventies explore society's underside. Bob Adelman gets very cozy with pimps and prostitutes, then withholds all judgment in a series that's part edgy family album, part uneasy reality show. Joyce Baronio brings sex-show performers to her daylight studio and encourages them to dress up and shrug off the after-hours clichés. The best work is by Jerry Berndt, the son of a tavern owner, who photographs in and around a number of barrooms with an insider's eye for the whiskey and the damage done. Through Aug. 25. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

"YES BRUCE NAUMAN"
Nauman is the art world's Thomas Pynchon or Don DeLillo: an artist-trickster besotted with language, humor, and the absurd. He's also proved immeasurably influential to younger generations. A few key Nauman works demonstrate his whip-smart cleverness, from the stretched-out letters of "My Name as Though It Were Written on the Surface of the Moon" (1967) to the happily vulgar "Bouncing Balls" video to his simultaneously menacing and silly persona in the "Clown Torture Series." Direct homage is paid in works like Francesco Vezzoli's updated "Bouncing Balls," Rirkrit Tiravanija's display of his own name in neon, and John Bock's psycho-jester videos. Like Pynchon and DeLillo, too, Nauman seems to have inspired mostly male disciples and imitators: Jessica Diamond's eponymous "Yes Bruce Nauman" text painting and a Diana Thater video are the only works here by women. Through Sept. 9. (Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677.)

Short List

NANCY RUBINS: Lincoln Center, Broadway at 64th St. 212-980-4575. Through Sept. 4. **DORIS ULMANN:** De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 212-327-1482. Through Sept. 23. **"FREEING THE LINE":** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Aug. 26.

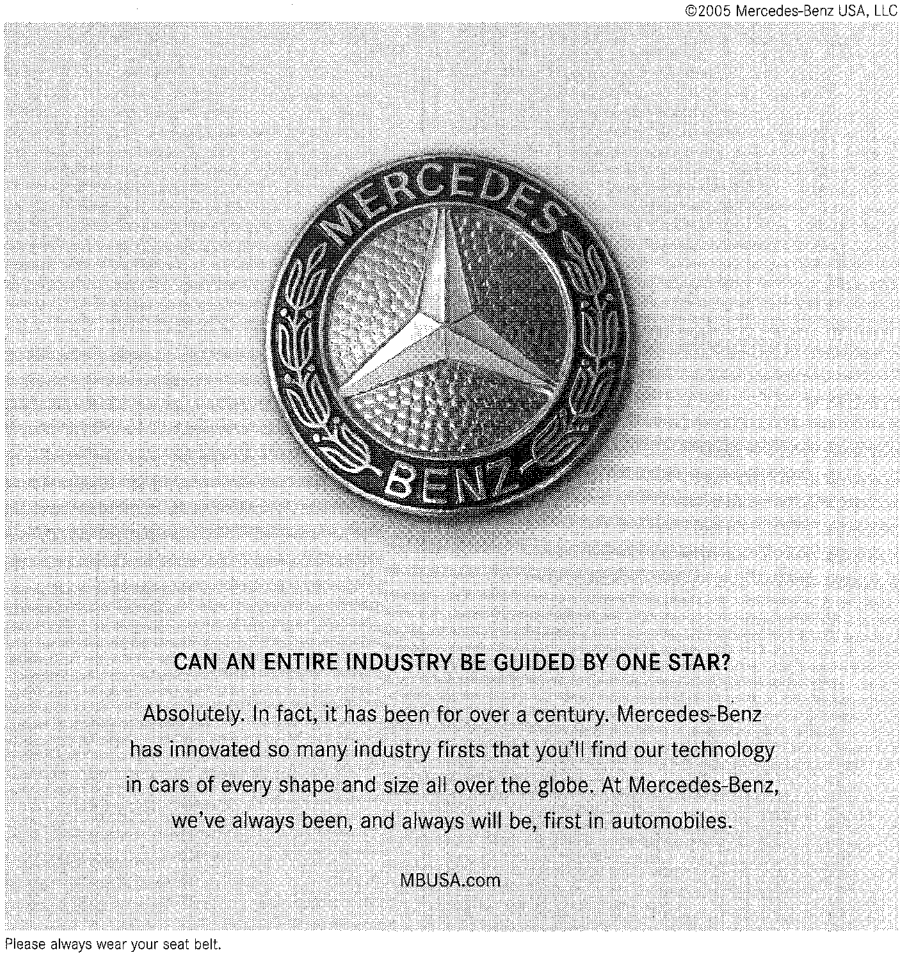
GALLERIES—CHELSEA

TARA DONOVAN
Donovan's sculptural work gains power through the sheer accretion of everyday objects. Minimalist topographical landscapes are forged from millions of plastic cups or pencils. Her drawings—which might more accurately be described as prints—function along similar principles, but with more modest results. Rubber bands are the medium here; Donovan arranges them in trays, inks them, and presses paper to the lot. The patterns resemble starfish and seaweed, skeins of yarn or hair, and microscopic views of cells. Craft and imagination set them apart from ordinary abstractions, just as Donovan's skill, in all her work, is performing a kind of apotheosis on the readymade, transforming mundane objects into something marvellous. Through Aug. 25. (PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000.)

NANCY RUBINS
Rubins is famous for enormous, vertiginous sculptures involving hundreds of used airplane parts wired together in aerial concatenations. As fragmented wholes they are soaring and exciting, though the idea of the crash is ever present. A cheerful new work now on view at Lincoln Center is composed of watercraft—kayaks, rowboats, Jet Skis, canoes—all ganged together like petals exploding from an unseen core. The brightly colored photo-collages presented here are studies for it and other pleasure-craft-based sculptures. Through Aug. 18. (Kasmin, 511 W. 27th St. 212-563-4474.)

"DERECONSTRUCTION"
Collage, assemblage, Constructivism, and inspired trash-picking ground a group show organized by the artist and curator Matthew Higgs. A variety of strategies and media are represented, from a painterly crocheted web, stuck through with small tree branches, by Alexandra Bircken, to the concrete poetry of Christopher Knowles, typed in red and black ink on pale paper panels. Takeshi Murata contributes a liquid, pixellated video, and Vincent Fecteau's plastic-and-plaster sculptures stand somewhere between architectural models, lumps of debris, and seashells or seedpods. Among those included are Rita Ackermann, Bruce Conner, A. R. Penck, and Linder Sterling. Through Aug. 17. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

"I'M YOURS NOW"
This powerhouse display of wall drawings ranges from eye-popping Op-ish color to mad-scientist figuration to slyly high-concept installation, yet somehow manages to seem coherent. The young artists—from England, Denmark, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, the Netherlands, and the U.S.—were brought together by the artist-curator Arturo Herrera, who starts things off groovy with design-based abstraction from Jan Van der Ploeg, Ann Veronica Janssens, and Terry Haggerty, gives us a dose of kooky with dream landscapes by Jeff Bechtel and Jorge Queiroz, and lets Claudia Wieser make a full-room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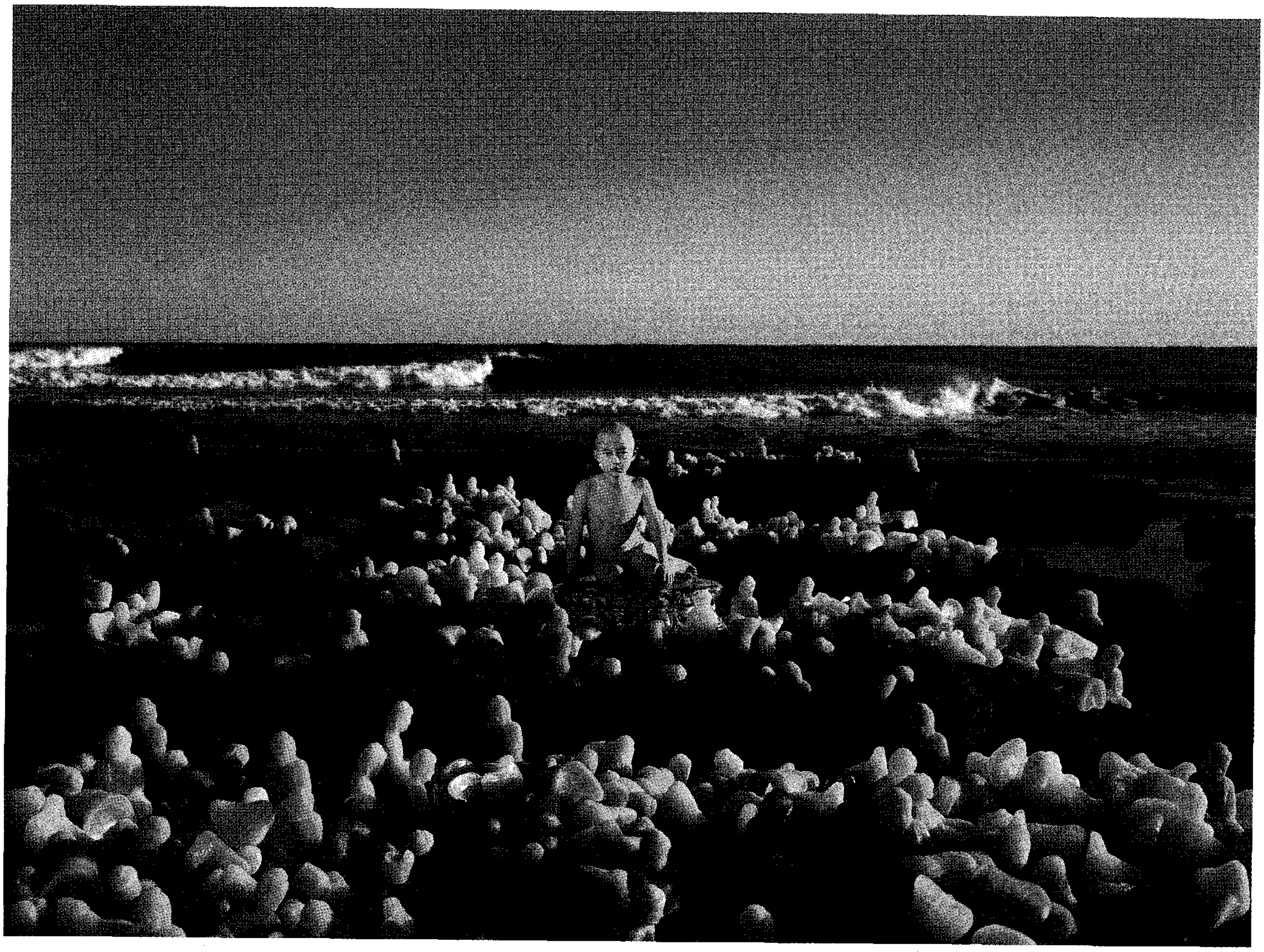

Atta Kim's "Museum Project #125" (2001), from his "Nirvana" series, at the International Center of Photography.

environment in black, white, and silver to contrast with Simon Dybbroe Møller's one-two punch: an apparent ceiling leak, whose brownish stain resolves into a portrait head. Through Aug. 18. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

Short List

MICHAEL HEIZER: PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through Sept. 23. **HOWARDENA PINDELL:** N'Namdi, 526 W. 26th St. 212-929-6645. Through Aug. 31. **HANS RICHTER:** Stendhal, 545 W. 20th St. 212-366-1549. Through Sept. 15. **MARTIN SCHOELLER:** Hasted Hunt, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-0006. Through Sept. 1. **RICHARD SERRA:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through Sept. 23. **"ARCADIA":** Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610. Through Aug. 25. **"SMALL WONDERS":** Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-989-7600. Through Aug. 25. **"SOUTINE AND MODERN ART":** Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Sept. 9.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

ALEXANDER CALDER

There are six works by the perennial crowd-pleaser Calder on view in the Public Art Fund's current installation: five freestanding painted-steel sculptures in City Hall Park and, inside the hall itself, a mobile made of ovoid disks in black steel. With summer plantings at their height and the fountain bubbling, the outdoor pieces—which date from the late fifties through the late seventies—look like charmingly abstracted zoo animals amid the greenery. But the mobile is the pièce de résistance, striking just the right outré note in the graceful Federal-style rotunda. Normally, only organized tours are allowed into the building, but a nice police officer may let you take a peek. Through March 18, 2007. (City Hall Park. For further information, see www.publicartfund.org.)

"MARILYN"

Like the pyramids, the Eiffel Tower, and Niagara Falls, Marilyn Monroe was one of those marvels every photographer wanted to snap. Even before she made a movie, Monroe's love affair with the camera had turned her into a pop icon, and she was rarely out of some photographer's sight. Cecil Beaton, Elliott Erwitt, Eve Arnold, Andre De Dienes, and Philippe Halsman, all included here, were among the lucky ones who captured her, but plenty of others took a shot at the legend, and she vamped them all. Shooting from Samuel Goldwyn's upper-story window, Phil Stern catches Monroe striding across the M-G-M lot, alone and unaware but smiling like she hasn't a care in the world. Through Sept. 1. (Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 212-966-6223.)

OUT OF TOWN

THE FIELDS AT ART OMI

Columbia County's premier sculpture park is nestled among rolling green hills, with a gorgeous view of the purple-tinged Catskills in the distance. Perennial installations include Carl Andre's "Cascade," which resembles a set of ancient marble steps that lead nowhere, and Donald Lipski's goofy "Dirt Ball," a huge orb made of rope. A recent addition is DeWitt Godfrey's wonderful "Picker Sculpture," in which giant ribbons of Corten steel are squeezed between the trees. Other artists have expanded the sculpture-park idiom, using strobe lights (Olafur Eliasson), sound (Matthew McCaslin and Jeff Talman), or computers (J. Shih Chieh Huang), while a summer installation of photographs printed on vinyl mesh, by Type A, Portia Munson, Meredith Allen, and others, is inserted cleverly into the woodland landscape. Ongoing. (Omi International Arts Center, 59 Letter S Rd., Ghent, N.Y. 518-392-2181.)

DANCE

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP

Though Morris and his gang are regulars at the Mostly Mozart Festival, this is the first year that they will actually be dancing to Mozart. And that's the least of the reasons why "Mozart Dances" is a major event. In honor of multiple anniversaries—the twenty-fifth of the group, the fortieth of the festival, the two-hundred-and-fiftieth of Mozart's birth—the scale is large: it's the first evening-length work that Morris, one of the greatest living choreographers, has made for his company in years. Set to Piano Concertos Nos. 11 and 27 and the Sonata in D major for Two Pianos, as performed by the pianists Emanuel Ax and Yoko Nozaki with the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, the dance takes place against three backdrops by Howard Hodgkin. Louis Langrée conducts. (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500. Aug. 17-19 at 8.)

SMUIN BALLET

Michael Smuin's company concludes its run at the Joyce. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Aug. 16 and Aug. 19 at 2 and 8 and Aug. 17-18 at 8.)

"OASIS"

The Shanghai-born H. T. Chen—founder of the Asian-American dance group H. T. Chen & Dancers—and the young downtown dancer and choreographer Sharon Estacio have created site-specific works that will be performed as part of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's free "Sitelines" series. (Columbus Park, at Baxter, Mulberry, Bayard, and Worth Sts. 212-219-9401. Aug. 16-17 at 7 and Aug. 18 at 12:30.)

MARTHA GRAHAM DANCE COMPANY
Heavily in debt and under new management, the august troupe has tightened its belt of late and hit the road. Consequently, this free Lincoln Center Out of Doors event looks to be one of the few New York performances in its eightieth-anniversary season. The program includes the early all-female powerhouse work "Sketches from Chronicle"; "Diversion of Angels," Graham's lyric essay on three aspects of love; and the late, backward-looking "Acts of Light." (Damrosch Park Band Shell. 212-546-2656. Aug. 16 at 8.)

"DANCEOFF! HAPPY HOUR"
The choreographers Dean Bartlett (of Streb) and Katie Workum return to Lincoln Center Out of Doors with their quirky talent-show-like event in which several choreographers present brief snatches of works in progress or specially made sketches in quick succession. This edition includes Ivy Baldwin, whose recent "Gone Missing" evoked a snowy wilderness filled with whispers and enigmatic figures; Battleworks; and Big Dance Theatre, a company that uses music and dance to interpret literary texts. (Josie Robertson Plaza, Lincoln Center. 212-546-2656. Aug. 17 at 5.)

MISNOMER DANCE THEATRE
Chris Elam's "Throw People" gets an extended run at the Brooklyn Lyceum Theatre. People are thrown and twisted into human origami and tied into three-person pretzels with only two feet on the ground. Elam's wonderfully strange and unpredictable choreography makes his dancers seem less like people than like anthropomorphized beasts. (227 Fourth Ave., Brooklyn. 718-857-4816. Aug. 17-18 and Aug. 20 at 7 and Aug. 19 at 5 and 7. Through Aug. 27.)

ELLIS WOOD DANCE
As part of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's free "Sitelines" series, the twenty women in Wood's ensemble perform "Fire on Wall Street," one of the choreographer's four-elements displays of feminine power, amid the concrete and glass of the financial district. Barely clothed in a web of red mesh, the dancers writhe like maenads on the balconies of Cipriani's, a conflagration of tulle in the land of ticker tape. (55 Wall St. 212-219-9401. Aug. 21-22 at noon and 12:30. Through Aug. 30.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
The Pacific Northwest Ballet makes its first East Coast appearance in ten years, under the new directorship of the beloved former New York City Ballet principal Peter Boal. The program includes one Balanchine classic—"Duo Concertant"—along with Val Caniparoli's popular Africa-meets-Bach jamboree, "Lambarena," and two works made for the company. In the Doris Duke Studio Theatre, the Greek company Choreftes makes its American début with the inscrutable, hour-long "Behind Her Eyes." Girls in summer dresses are illuminated by desk lamps held by stagehands, a series of couples embody various kinds of romantic partnership, boys bond, and a lap dance leads to a gang rape. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. Aug. 16-20. For complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. Through Aug. 26.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

NEW YORK CITY OPERA: "AFTERNOON ARIAS"
A group of appealing young singers from the company's roster (including the soprano Inna Dukach and the baritone Michael Corvino) gather to offer a series of free lunchtime concerts in the alfresco setting of Bryant Park. The programs feature arias and ensembles from operas by Puccini, Verdi, and Bizet; Gerald Steichen is at the piano. (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. Aug. 15-18 at 12:30. No tickets required.)

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL
Aug. 16 at 8: The incomparable Tallis Scholars sing choral works by Isaac, Schütz, and Allegri (the beloved "Miserere"). (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St.) ♦ Aug. 17-19 at 8: Mark Morris's new "Mozart Dances" is the first of two commissions gracing the festival's fortieth-anniversary season in the coming days; for more information, see Dance. (New York State Theatre.) ♦ Aug. 20 at 5: The violinist Joshua Bell and some honored friends—including the pianist Frederic Chiu, the violinist Colin Jacobsen, and the dazzling Miró Quartet—perform Mozart's Piano Quartet in G Minor, Mendelssohn's Octet, and a new work by Edgar Meyer. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 22-23 at 8: Lars Vogt, a pianist of uncommon intelligence and intensity, is featured in the Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, one of three Mozart works in the festival orchestra's latest concert. Lisa Batiashvili makes an auspicious festival début in the world première of the Violin Concerto by Magnus Lindberg, an extraordinary Finnish composer whose music abounds in energy and color; Louis Langrée conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 22 at 10:30: Lindberg gets a "Little Night Music" concert all to himself, as the International Contemporary Ensemble offers the Clarinet Quintet, "Linea d'Ombra," and the U.S. première of "Zona." (Kaplan Penthouse.) (212-721-6500.)

BARGEMUSIC
Aug. 17-18 at 7:30: The impassioned cellist Edward Arron, with the pianist Jeewon Park, offers Stravinsky's "Suite Italienne," Mendelssohn's Cello Sonata in B-Flat Major, and Rachmaninoff's Sonata in G Minor. ♦ Aug. 19 at 7:30 and Aug. 20 at 4: Haydn's "Emperor" String Quartet and Brahms's Piano Quintet are highlights of a program by the Gala Quartet, who perform with the pianist Gerald Robbins. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

"MET IN THE PARKS"
On the verge of one of the most transformative seasons in the company's history, the Metropolitan Opera sticks with a three-decade-old tradition this month, offering its popular series of free parks concerts at locations throughout the five boroughs and in New Jersey; there are no fancy costumes or sets to be seen, but the music-making is remarkably genuine. It begins with **"La Traviata,"** featuring Hei-Kyung Hong, Wookyung Kim, and Charles Taylor in the leading roles and Derrick Inouye conducting; **"Rigoletto"** joins the repertory on the next evening. (Great Lawn, Central Park. Aug. 22 at 8. No tickets required. Through Sept. 2.)

OUT OF TOWN

BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
An excerpt from Terry Riley's "Salome Dances for Peace" shares a program with repertory works by Mahler and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in C Minor) in the first concert of the festival's final week; the superb performers include the violinist James Ehnes and the cellist Fred Sherry. (Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church. 631-537-6368. Aug. 16 at 7:30. For full schedule, see www.bcmf.org.)

COOPERSTOWN CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
Baseball's locus classicus is also home to some first-rate classical music. The soprano Amy Burton and the harpsichordist Bradley Brookshire are two of the estimable featured artists in an upcoming program of arias and sonatas by Purcell, Bach, and Marin Marais. (Christ Episcopal Church, Cooperstown, N.Y. 877-666-7421. Aug. 16 at 7:30.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
Aug. 17 at 8 and Aug. 20 at 1:30: A much anticipated production of Janáček's **"Jenůfa,"** by Jonathan Miller, leads off the week, featuring the charismatic American soprano Maria Kanyova in the title role; Stewart Robertson, the company's outgoing music di-

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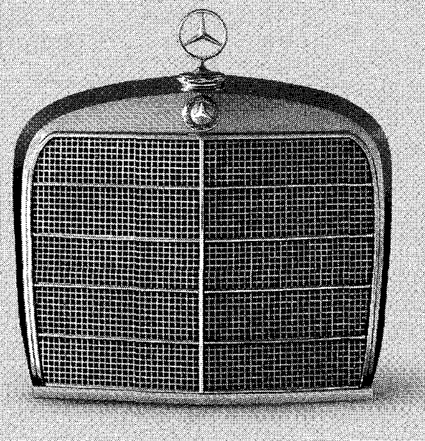

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ONE IF BY LAND

Photography aficionados disappointed that the medium gets so little room or serious attention in the Whitney's "Full House" survey can find consolation at the Museum of Modern Art, where the latest reinstallation of the permanent photography collection culminates in a shrewdly edited show of recent acquisitions focussing on the landscape. As is typical for MOMA, much of the work—by ten international artists and one collaborative team—gives equal weight to aesthetic and social concerns. An-My Lê's vista of a scrub-covered desert would seem to be a fairly ordinary slice of the American West, but it's also the site of military exercises, and the line of white smoke rising in the distance is fresh evidence of mortar fire. Sze Tsung Leong's elegantly composed long shots of Chinese cities are studies of wrenching transition: at the end of an alleyway flanked by crumbling brick buildings stands a skyscraper so pristine it might be imaginary. And twelve pictures by David Goldblatt investigate another sort of transition—the day-to-day life of postapartheid South Africa, as experienced by venders, barbers, and other struggling entrepreneurs on the country's roadsides.

—Vince Aletti

rector, conducts. ♦ Aug. 18 at 1:30 and 8 and Aug. 21 at 1:30: Gilbert and Sullivan's **"Pirates of Penzance,"** featuring Megan Monaghan, Anthony Laciura, and Chad A. Johnson; Gary Thor Wedow. ♦ Aug. 19 and Aug. 22 at 1:30: The mezzo-soprano Katharine Goeldner plays the ingénue Rosina in Rossini's bubbling **"Barber of Seville"**; David Angus. ♦ Aug. 19 at 8: The distinguished American composer Stephen Hartke steps into the operatic realm with **"The Greater Good,"** a treatment of the Maupassant story "Boule de Suif," a bitter tale about the manipulation of a good-hearted prostitute during the Franco-Prussian War. The radiant Caroline Worra takes the leading role; Robertson. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

TANGLEWOOD

Aug. 17 at 8:30: The Tallis Scholars offer a repeat of their Mostly Mozart program. ♦ Aug. 18 at 6: The violinist Hilary Hahn sits in with members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra for a compact chamber concert of music by Mozart (the Piano Trio in E Major, K. 542) and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in C Minor). ♦ Aug. 18 at 8:30: Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, a colorful veteran interpreter of standard repertory, leads the orchestra in a program of French and Spanish masterworks by Falla ("Nights in the Gardens of Spain," with the pianist Josep Colom), Debussy ("La Mer"), and Ravel ("Boléro"). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8:30: Hahn, a player of exacting musicality, performs Dvořák's Violin Concerto on a concert that also features Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 ("Eroica"); Herbert Blomstedt, a sagacious Swede with a longtime association to Tanglewood, conducts. ♦ Aug. 20 at 2:30: De Burgos returns to the Shed to conduct an all-Brahms concert featuring the Second Symphony and the Second Piano Concerto (with the formidable Peter Serkin). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL: "FRANZ LISZT AND HIS WORLD"

Aug. 18 at 8: In "Liszt and National Aspirations," such performers as the pianist Jeremy Denk and the mezzo-soprano Jill Grove (along with the Bard Festival Chorale) offer works by a slate of non-Germanic composers of Liszt's time, including Grieg (the persuasive Violin Sonata No. 3 in C Minor), Smetana, Glinka, and Mussorgsky (the song cycle "The Nursery"), in addition to choral pieces by Liszt and Schumann. ♦ Aug. 19 at 8: In the Romantic Age, art and religion competed for the allegiance of men's souls. Leon Botstein leads the American Symphony Orchestra in a program fusing the two realms—excerpts from Liszt's oratorio "Christus" and from Berlioz's "L'Enfance du Christ," along with Liszt's monumental "Faust" Symphony. ♦ Aug. 20 at 1:30: During Liszt's final years, the questing, Romantic impulse of his music became extreme, laying the groundwork for the radical experiments of the twentieth century. The pianists Arnaldo Cohen and Orion Weiss, among other musicians, offer such mysterious little pieces as "Nuages Gris" and "La Lugubre Gondola II" on a program that also includes like-minded vocal and instrumental works by Debussy, Bruckner, and Franck. ♦ Aug. 20 at 5:30: In the final concert of the summer, Botstein conducts the A.S.O. in works for voices and orchestra by two titans, Liszt (the symphonic poems "Orpheus" and "From the Cradle to the Grave" and excerpts from the "Gran" Mass) and Wagner (the Good Friday Music from "Parsifal"). (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. For full schedule, see www.fishercenter.bard.edu.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

To sit in one of the burnished wooden chairs of the hundred-year-old Music Shed—where Sibelius, Rachmaninoff, and Kreisler once held sway—is to appreciate the quiet elegance and layered sense of history that the Yale School of Music's summer festival exudes. This year's concerts conclude with an evening of choral and instrumental music by Handel, Joan Panetti ("A Gust Inside the God," a new work inspired by a Rilke poem), and a variety of Renaissance composers. (Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000. Aug. 19 at 8.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS

The Shanghai String Quartet, one of the most vital and disciplined of the brilliant younger generation of quartets, performs the second of Mozart's "Prussian" Quartets along with the First Quartet by Bartók and the String Quartet in F Major by Ravel. (Woodstock, N.Y. 845-679-8217. Aug. 20 at 3.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN

The excellent Arianna String Quartet visits Connecticut's string-quartet shrine, offering works by Mozart, Beethoven (the valedictory Quartet in F Major, Op. 135), and Brahms (the Piano Quintet, with Alpin Hong). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Aug. 20 at 3.)

MOVIES OPENING

ACCEPTED

A comedy, directed by Steve Pink, in which a high-school student (Justin Long) who is not accepted at any college decides to start his own. Opening Aug. 18. (In wide release.)

FACTOTUM

An adaptation of a novel by Charles Bukowski, starring Matt Dillon as a writer who drinks, does odd jobs, and philanders. Directed by Bent Hamer. Opening Aug. 18. (IFC Center.)

THE ILLUSIONIST

Edward Norton stars in this drama, about a magician in turn-of-the-century Vienna. Directed by Neil Burger. Opening Aug. 18. (Paris.)

MATERIAL GIRLS

A comedy, directed by Martha Coolidge, starring Hilary Duff and Haylie Duff as two young heiresses who lose their money and have to earn a living. Opening Aug. 18. (In wide release.)

THE PUSHER TRILOGY

Three feature films, directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, about a Copenhagen drug dealer (Kim Bodnia) and his problems at home and at work. In Danish. Opening Aug. 18. (Cinema Village.)

SNAKES ON A PLANE

David R. Ellis directed this thriller, starring Samuel L. Jackson, about a killer seeking to execute a witness in midflight. Opening Aug. 18. (In wide release.)

10TH & WOLF

James Marsden stars in this drama, directed by Robert Moresco, about a soldier who returns to Philadelphia and gets involved with the Mafia. Opening Aug. 18. (Village East Cinemas.)

TRUST THE MAN

A romantic comedy, starring David Duchovny and Billy Crudup, about two men who try to save their failing relationships. Directed by Bart Freundlich. Opening Aug. 18. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHER WOMEN

If audiences are split down the middle on the merits of Hans Canosa's film, that will be a fitting response. From beginning to end, the movie itself is divided in two, with one half of the screen going mostly to Helena Bonham Carter and the other being hogged by Aaron Eckhart. They play a pair of wedding guests who meet in New York and spend at least half the night together; in the course of their discussions, and their entwinings, it becomes clear that they were serious old flames and that what the film recounts is a rekindling. This makes it too sad to be a fling, and the couple's time together feels increasingly joyless. Canosa wrings as much drama as he can from his fifty-fifty screen, and the actors respond well to the camera's nagging inspection (which gives a listener as much attention as a person delivering lines), yet by the end the device feels helplessly claustrophobic—worthy of something freer and fresher, perhaps, than a one-night stand in a hotel.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/7 & 14/06.) (62nd and Broadway and Sunshine Cinema.)

CROSS OF IRON

In his only modern-war movie—about Germans battling Soviets, and one another, during the Battle of Krymskaya, in 1943—Sam Peckinpah creates a landscape of horror on the Russian front. He captures gut-wrenching atrocities, but his uncanny use of explosions to punctuate scenes matter-of-factly is what jolts viewers into the combatants' rattled minds. Despite some awkward dialogue, he pulls off astonish-

DAVID GOLDBLATT, "BARBERS, NEWTON, JOHANNESBURG" (2003)

ing moments, such as a soldier slapping a passionate kiss on a distraught bunkermate to shock him into silence. James Coburn's leathery presence is ideal for the role of Sergeant Steiner, whose sole remaining devotion is to his platoon. The brilliantly edited section in which Steiner recuperates at a hospital and keeps seeing his men (or no men at all) in place of other maimed and wounded patients says more about the insidious residue of war than any tract. James Hamilton and Walter Kelley wrote the script (Julius J. Epstein also gets a credit), based on Willi Heinrich's novel.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM; Aug. 16.)

THE DESCENT

A group of female friends gather together for their yearly spelunking adventure and descend into an uncharted Appalachian cave, where they soon find themselves lost inside a maze of pitch-black tunnels and realize that they are not alone. The first half of the film is thrilling, with the director, Neil Marshall, keenly conveying claustrophobia and disorientation in dark, forbidding places. And the actors, particularly the group's unofficial leader (Natalie Mendoza), are primed with an athletic prowess that's convincingly heroic. When the film turns horrific in the second half, the group is in splinters, being picked off by albino monsters that are semi-human and blind as bats. With audacious lighting (huge portions of the screen are filmed in murky darkness) and fantastically grimy sets (built on a soundstage in England), Marshall constructs a shrewdly assaulting atmosphere. Bloody mayhem has rarely been so anxiously inspired.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

HALF NELSON

The young Canadian actor Ryan Gosling is quietly charismatic as Dan Dunne, a schoolteacher in a tough section of Brooklyn who knows how to teach history to his thirteen- and fourteen-year-old African-American students. Dunne is smart and dedicated, but he's also freebasing cocaine. When a girl in his class, Drey (Shareeka Epps), catches him in the act, a bond develops between them. The movie, made with a handheld camera by the team of Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden, is alert to the tensions in the two characters' lives and the raffish neighborhood milieu, but one comes away from it thinking that the filmmakers have coddled their hero. He is, after all, failing not only himself but the students who depend on him. The sources of Dunne's addiction are obscure, but "Half Nelson" nevertheless builds his problems into a parable of the misfortunes of liberalism.—*David Denby* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

JOHN TUCKER MUST DIE

John Tucker (Jesse Metcalfe) is the star athlete and irresistible heartthrob of a big suburban high school. Three girls he plays around with find out about each other and help a fourth, the nondescript Kate (Brittany Snow), to become the surrogate seductress who will break his heart. The promising setup is botched in execution: the script lacks a feel for the sound and the substance of teen life and the young performers are devoid of spirit. When the only spark of life is provided by Jenny McCarthy, as Kate's serial-dating mother, it's trouble: next to this terminally witless fare, "Mean Girls" is Shakespeare.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

A charming, independently made family comedy about a winner-take-all society—America—that is driving its citizens crazy. Its hero and victim, Richard Hoover (Greg Kinnear), is a motivational speaker who has invented a nine-step program for success. His seven-year-old daughter, Olive (Abigail Breslin), is entering a Little Miss Sunshine contest; his stepson, Dwayne (Paul Dano), has a private dream in which he is a Nietzschean Übermensch; his wife's brother (Steve Carell), whom the family has taken in, is the No. 1 Proust scholar in the country but has made a fool of himself over a male graduate student who has leaped into the bed of the No. 2 Proust scholar. Is winning everything? The writer, Michael Arndt, and the husband-and-wife directing team, Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, narrowly avoid the family-comedy pitfalls of whimsy and mush, but Arndt has a good ear for domestic irritations and the acting is just tough enough to keep us off balance. With Alan Arkin and Toni Collette as the family's realists.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

Humphrey Bogart in John Huston's "Treasure of the Sierra Madre," at MOMA.

JASHAR AWAN

MIAMI VICE

Michael Mann, returning to the sunshine-bright and overripe material of the old TV show (he was executive producer of the series), hasn't hidden the sun, exactly, but the general tone is darker, danker, dirtier, and much more violent. The euphemisms of television have vanished—the blood hits the wall with a splat—and the material is now grim and self-important. Colin Farrell is Detective Sonny Crockett, and Jamie Foxx is Detective Lieutenant Ricardo Tubbs. These are serious fellows; they don't engage in debonair lounge-lizard repartee—they hardly engage at all (Farrell is sullen and withdrawn). Pretending to be big-time drug transporters, the boys travel to Haiti and Colombia and insinuate themselves into a drug-smuggling ring. Mann's narrative method is terse, abrupt, and fragmentary, and his dialogue consists mainly of cop-and-drug-dealer jargon spit out of the corner of someone's mouth. The movie is hard to follow, but it has its moments of licentious pleasure, especially when Colin Farrell and Gong Li, who plays the drug kingpin's mistress, take off for Cuba, speeding across the Caribbean in a twin-engine Super Cat.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

MONSTER HOUSE

Directed by Gil Kenan and produced by Robert Zemeckis and Steven Spielberg, this animated horror film, about a group of kids terrorized by a house that gobbles up all who pass by, has the scares and the wit of a great amusement-park ride. The motion-capture technology that Zemeckis developed for "The Polar Express" (the actors are filmed and then exaggeratedly computer-animated) is even better suited to this creepy story. The screenplay is a boilerplate kids' film (the adults are clueless, and it's up to the children to save the day), but the snappy dialogue pops with a child's-eye view of adult conversation, and the thrills—and there are many—are wonderfully scary; they bring a smile after the fright. With the grimacing, motion-captured face of Kathleen Turner as the monster house.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MAN'S CHEST

This is the second part of a trilogy, Disney having decided that there were dense thematic issues, not to mention narrative niceties, that could not be constrained within a single "Pirates" film; any financial consideration was, of course, entirely secondary. Once again, we accompany Captain Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp) as he pursues his fate—or the needle of his compass—across the waters. Keira Knightley resumes her romantic role, as does Orlando Bloom, although his presence is not exactly strong enough to rip a hole in the screen. The director, Gore Verbinski, may marshal the action into some kind of order, but the show is truly run (and strung out) by the special effects; why else would a writhing sea monster, having munched on one ship, come back for a second helping? If the film works, it is largely because of Depp, whose performance owes more and more to Mary Pickford and less to Douglas Fairbanks. Depp continues to dominate the proceedings, aided in this instance by Bill Nighy, who—together with his animated beard—breathes life into the deceased Davy Jones.—*A.L.* (7/24/06) (In wide release.)

QUINCEAÑERA

A rite of passage for Latinas, the fifteenth-birthday celebration, is the springboard for this drama of transformation and urban gentrification in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. The story concerns Magdalena (newcomer Emily Rios, in a charming performance), who gets pregnant and is sent to live with her great-uncle (Chalo González) and her semi-delinquent gay cousin (Jesse Garcia). The writer-directors, Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, avoid histrionics and bring a gentler vitality to the conflicts of changing mores in the Latino community. Their colorful, optimistic view of the characters' complex lives is refreshingly unsentimental, and their almost giddy, bare-bones pride in the film's low-budget look is matter-of-factly cheering.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE RISE AND FALL OF LEGS DIAMOND

A strange, cold, unpleasant movie about a strange, cold, unpleasant gangster. In this historical film noir about the Prohibition era, from 1960, director Budd Boetticher presents Diamond (the glossy, marmoreal Ray Danton) as a cold-blooded go-getter in a glamour-free Mob milieu that runs solely on money. This elemental view of the gunman's appalling trajectory lays bare its absurdity: Diamond's daring deeds to force open the doors of criminal power have the gee-whiz wonder of silent-comedy slapstick, but put to ends so amoral as to stifle laughter. Tested by tough times and tough guys, Diamond lacks even a thief's honor to fall back on: he comes from nowhere, ends up nowhere, and leaves nothing but a trail of blood and legend. With Jesse White, the Maytag Man, as a crook with an appetite.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Aug. 17.)

SCOOP

In Woody Allen's latest, Woody is a cut-rate magician known as the Great Splendini, and Scarlett Johansson, who is charming, is his protégée, Sondra, a college-newspaper reporter who gets a tip on a big story from a dead journalist (Ian McShane) conjured up by Splendini. The conceit is barely tolerable, but it gets the movie under way, and Woody and Scarlett are fitfully amusing as an unlikely pair of sleuths who run around London quarrelling and putting people on in posh houses and private clubs. To enjoy it, however, you have to love Woody's fumbling, stumbling delivery, with its many hesitations and sudden explosions of worry or distaste. At the age of seventy, he's certainly not hiding his crotchets. Hugh Jackman plays a powerful man who may or may not have committed a string of murders.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

TALLADEGA NIGHTS: THE BALLAD OF RICKY BOBBY
This ambitious, overblown comedy offers elaborate imitations of humor but is rarely funny. The two-part title alone hints at trouble: Will Ferrell throws his ample comic weight at the broad target of NASCAR racing, and also at the sodden, sentimental tale of a racing legend's rise, fall, and rise. The result is a garish, loud parody of a garish, loud world, as well as a treacly fable of family togetherness that drags on like a never-ending pit stop. Sacha Baron Cohen, as Jean Girard, a gay French existentialist Formula One driver who challenges Ferrell's champ, adds little to the lines that the writers—Adam McKay, who also directed, and Ferrell—gave him, and the script must have seemed much funnier in the office (and the bloopers that accompany the closing credits prove it). One scene, a family dinner where Ricky Bobby says grace in his own unique way, is memorably sharp, and Greg Germann and Molly Shannon bring surprising pathos to small roles as a race-team owner and his alcoholic wife.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

13 TZAMETI
A perspiring first film from the young Georgian director Gela Babluani. Just over a decade ago, Babluani moved to France; although the movie takes place there, it feels far from settled, and you keep asking yourself about the fears that he may have imported from his native land. His pale-faced brother Georges plays a builder who, whether from boredom or bravado, assumes the identity of a deceased client, plunging into an adventure whose outcome he cannot guess. It begins like a Simenon tale, in a quiet seaside location, yet becomes a twisted fairy tale in the depths of a wood. What unravels there should be beyond belief, but such is Babluani's grip on events, and so ominous is the black-and-white photography, that what might have seemed a nasty contrivance comes across as a calm investigation of fate.—*A.L.* (8/7 & 14/06) (Film Forum.)

YOU, ME AND DUPREE
Kate Hudson and the heavy-browed Matt Dillon, who don't really belong together as actors, get married; the newlyweds take into their house a life-loving bum, played by Owen Wilson, who proceeds to wreck the union. The basic premise is slightly offensive: the Wilson character is presented as a test of everyone's humanity, but he's actually a pain in the neck whom anyone in their right mind, and especially newlyweds, would immediately throw out. Wilson runs around bare-assed and is meant to be lovable, which may be a jerk's last illusion. The direction by Anthony and Joe Russo is slightly off in every scene—perhaps because the material never made sense in the first place. With Michael Douglas as Hudson's sourpuss father.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

TABLES FOR TWO
CREMA

111 W. 17th St. (212-691-4477)—Julieta Ballesteros made her name as the chef at Mexicana Mama, a tiny restaurant in the Village whose homey atmosphere belied the sophistication of the cooking. Her new spot, in Chelsea, is swankier, with adobelike walls painted a livid orange, and a bar and lounge in front where guests can sip expensive cocktails or tequilas. Banquettes thread up one side of the narrow room, facing an open kitchen, where Ballesteros, a diminutive figure of nunlike severity, marshals her small kitchen staff. Perhaps on a dare, two tables have been squeezed into a back garden the size of a fire escape.

Ballesteros promises to deliver refined Mexican cuisine, which essentially means nicely executed, fairly familiar dishes; Mexican cooking, although regionally diverse, centers on a few staple processes. The menu's corn-tortilla dishes are uniformly excellent—including long crispy flautas with shredded chicken and mini tostadas bearing sautéed scallops topped with a gorgeously balanced mix of aioli and mango salsa—although the chips that accompany an order of salsa or guacamole are oddly insipid. A few ingredients still unfamiliar to most Americans pop up on the menu, such as huitlacoche, a fungus that infects maize and is considered a delicacy in Mexico. Restaurateurs, trying to get wary diners to eat the stuff, have taken to calling it Mexican truffle, but, served here in a thick soup topped with *Cotija* cheese, it proves to have a sweeter, less intense taste. The wisdom of sticking to traditional formats seems borne out by some of the more innovative creations. Chicken with squash-blossom purée, portobello mushroom, and goat cheese sounded enticing but was basically a piece of breast meat overwhelmed by a large puddle of what seemed to be squash soup.

Dessert draws inspiration from the flavor of mole sauce, giving a dramatic twist to that ubiquitous restaurant offering the warm chocolate cake. Each bite should be savored: precisely twenty seconds after hitting the tongue, the rich chocolate taste gives way to an increasingly intense bloom of chili. After another twenty seconds, the heat fades and you can take a second bite. Those foolish enough to wolf their cake down all at once can be seen sipping water or letting their mouths hang open. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for lunch and dinner. Entrées $17-$26.)

—Leo Carey

Also Playing

THE BRIDESMAID: Angelika Film Center. **THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA:** In wide release (7/10 & 17/06). **LADY IN THE WATER:** In wide release. **SUPERMAN RETURNS:** In wide release (7/3/06).

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Warren Oates. Aug. 16 at 9:15: "Dillinger" (1973, John Milius). ♦ Aug. 17 at 7: "The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond" (†). ♦ Aug. 17 at 9:15: "Kid Blue" (1973, James Frawley). ♦ In première. Aug. 16-17 at 9:30: "Hamilton" (2006, Matthew Porterfield). ♦ In revival. Aug. 18 and Aug. 21-22 at 7 and 9:30 and Aug. 19-20 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Last Movie" (1971, Dennis Hopper).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through Aug. 29: The films of Sam Peckinpah. Aug. 16 at 6 and 9: "Cross of Iron" (†). ♦ Aug. 21 at 6:50 and 9:30: "The Killer Elite" (1975). ♦ Aug. 22 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia" (1974). ♦ "French Leading Men." All films are in French. Aug. 17 at 4:30, 6:50 and 9:15: "Les Tontons Flingueurs" (1963, Georges Lautner). ♦ Aug. 18 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Fire Within" (1963, Louis Malle). ♦ Aug. 19 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Pierrot le Fou" (1965, Jean-Luc Godard). ♦ Aug. 20 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "My Night at Maud's" (1969, Eric Rohmer).

BRYANT PARK
Sixth Ave. between 40th and 42nd Sts. (212-768-4242)—Through Aug. 21: HBO Bryant Park Film Festival. Lawn opens at 5; screening begins at dusk. Aug. 21: "Rocky" (1976, John G. Avildsen).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"Summer Swashbucklers." Aug. 16 at 1, 5:35, and 10:10: "Don Juan" (1926, Alan Crosland). ♦ Aug. 16 at 3:10 and 7:45: "The Buccaneer" (1938, Cecil B. DeMille). ♦ Aug. 17 at 1:30, 5:25, and 9:20: "Scaramouche" (1952, George Sidney). ♦ Aug. 17 at 3:45 and 7:40: "The Swordsman" (1948, Joseph H. Lewis). ♦ Aug. 18-19 at 1, 5:25, and 9:40: "Gunga Din" (1939, George Stevens). ♦ Aug. 18-19 at 3:15 and 7:40: "The Adventures of Robin Hood" (1938, Michael Curtiz and William Keighley). ♦ Aug. 20 at 1:10, 5:10, and 9:10: "The Sea Hawk" (1940, Curtiz). ♦ Aug. 20 at 3:30 and 7:30: "The Black Pirate" (1926, Albert Parker). ♦ Through Sept. 25: The films of Buster Keaton. All films are silent. Aug. 21 at 1:30, 4:35, 7:30, and 10:20: "Seven Chances" (1925). ♦ Aug. 21 at 2:45, 5:50, and 8:45: "Three Ages" (1923) and "Hard Luck" (1921).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." Aug. 18-19: "The Beales of Grey Gardens" (2006, Albert and David Maysles). ♦ The films of Akira Kurosawa. Aug. 18-20 at noon: "Ikiru" (1952; in Japanese).

LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS
Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280)—The films of Pedro Almodóvar. Call for showtimes. Aug. 16-22: "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (1988; in Spanish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"A View from the Vaults." Aug. 16 at 6: "Weddings and Babies" (1958, Morris Engel). ♦ Aug. 16 at 8: "A Perfect World" (1993, Clint Eastwood). ♦ Aug. 17 at 6: "Key Largo" (1948, John Huston). ♦ Aug. 17 at 8: "Buffalo '66" (1998, Vincent Gallo). ♦ Through Sept. 22: "The Huston Family: 75 Years on Film." Aug. 18 at 5:45: "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre" (1948, John Huston). ♦ Aug. 18 at 8: "The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean" (1972, John Huston). ♦ Aug. 19 at 3:30: "Prizzi's Honor" (1985, John Huston). ♦ Aug. 19 at 6: "Bastard out of Carolina" (1996, Anjelica Huston). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8: "Mr. Corbett's Ghost" (1987, Danny Huston). ♦ Aug. 20 at 1:30: "Rain" (1932, Lewis Milestone). ♦ Aug. 20 at 3:30: "Fat City" (1972, John Huston). ♦ Aug. 21 at 6:15: "Beat the Devil" (1954, John Huston). ♦ Aug. 21 at 8:15: "Wise Blood" (1979, John Huston).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Independence World Cinema Showcase." Aug. 18 at 7:30 and Aug. 19 at 6:30: "Spirit of the Beehive" (1973, Victor Erice; in Spanish). ♦ The films of Frank Borzage. Aug. 19 at 2: "Smilin' Through" (1941). ♦ Aug. 19 at 4:30: "Till We Meet Again" (1944). ♦ Aug. 20 at 4:30: "The Spanish Main" (1945). ♦ Aug. 20 at 6:30: "I've Always Loved You" (1946).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—Aug. 16 and Aug. 18-19 at 7 and Aug. 17, Aug. 20, and Aug. 22 at 9: "The Road to Guantánamo" (2006, Michael Winterbottom). ♦ Aug. 18 at 9: "Underworld, U.S.A." (1961, Samuel Fuller). ♦ Aug. 18 at 11: "Taxi Driver" (1976, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Aug. 19 at 10:45: "Easy Rider" (1969, Dennis Hopper).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Aug. 18-19: "Tron" (1982, Steven Lisberger).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—In revival. Aug. 19-20 at 5:15: "The Big Heat" (1953, Fritz Lang). ♦ Aug. 19-20 at 7: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Aug. 24: Russian science fiction. All films are in Russian. Aug. 16 at 1 and 6 and Aug. 17 at 4:15: "Planet of Storms" (1961, Pavel Klushantsev) and "The Cameraman's Revenge" (1912, Wladaslaw Starewicz; silent). ♦ Aug. 16 at 2:45, Aug. 17 at 1 and 8, and Aug. 20 at 6:30: "Ruslan and Ludmila" (1972, Aleksandr Ptushko). ♦ Aug. 16 at 8: "Aelita, Queen of Mars" (1924, Jakov Protazanov; silent). ♦ Aug. 17 at 6:15: "The Amphibian Man" (1961, Gennadi Kazansky and Vladimir Chebotarev). ♦ Aug. 18 at 3 and 8 and Aug. 19 at 4:30: "Solaris" (1972, Andrei Tarkovsky). ♦ Aug. 19 at 2: "A Spectre Haunts Europe" (1922, Vladimir Gardin; silent). ♦ Aug. 19 at 6:15 and Aug. 22 at 3:45 and 7:45: "Night Watch" (2004, Timur Bekmambetov). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8:30 and Aug. 22 at 2 and 6: "First on the Moon" (2005, Alexei Fedorchenko). ♦ Aug. 20 at 2 and 5 and Aug. 21 at 4: "Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka" (1961, Aleksandr Rou). ♦ Aug. 20 at 3:30 and Aug. 21 at 6: "Cosmic Voyage" (1936, Vasili Zhuravlev).

READINGS AND TALKS

"WORD FOR WORD"
The alfresco reading series in Bryant Park continues with the actor Anthony Rapp, whose new book is "Without You: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and the Musical 'Rent.'" He will be talking with the New York City Opera dramaturge Cori Ellison about his Broadway experience and about Puccini's opera "La Bohème." Prior to their conversation, cast members from "Rent" and City Opera vocalists will sing selections from the two works. (42nd St. between Fifth and Sixth Aves. For more information, call 212-803-5890. Aug. 16 at noon.)

"IN THE FLESH"
The erotic-literature reading series hosted by Rachel Kramer Bussel, the author of the *Village Voice's* "Lusty Lady" column, presents Marie Lyn Bernard, Lily Burana, Shari Goldhagen, Riain Grey, Shane Luitjens, Lisa Montanarelli, and Caridad Piñeiro. Candy and mini cupcakes will be distributed. (Happy Ending Lounge, 302 Broome St. No tickets necessary. Aug. 16 at 8.)

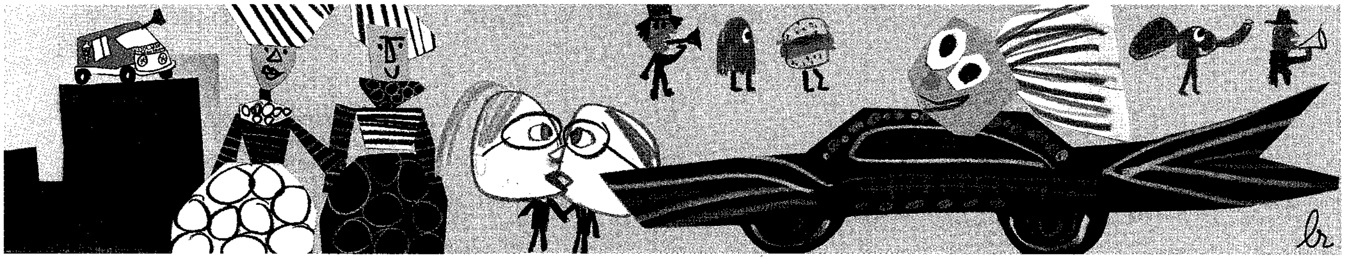
MICHAEL ABRAMS
The author offers selections from his new book about the urge to take flight, "Birdmen, Batmen, and Skyflyers: Wingsuits and the Pioneers Who Flew in Them, Fell in Them, and Perfected Them." (Barnes & Noble, 4 Astor Pl. No tickets necessary. Aug. 17 at 7.)

"DON QUIXOTE"
A marathon reading of the entirety of Miguel de Cervantes's novel is set for 192 Books, in Chelsea, starting on Aug. 22 at 7 and continuing for forty-eight hours, or until the book is finished. Edith Grossman, whose translation will be used, is the first reader. With Patti Smith, Wayne Koestenbaum, and many others. (192 Tenth Ave., at 21st St. To volunteer to read, call 212-255-4022.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BATTLE WEEK 2006
The first major engagement in the history of the United States took place two hundred and thirty years ago this month. Known by some as the Battle of Brooklyn and by others as the Battle of Long Island, the fight was a disaster for the Continental Army in all respects save one—Washington managed to retreat from Kings County to Manhattan with the bulk of his soldiers. A number of local events are scheduled to mark the anniversary, starting on Aug. 19, with a parade in Park Slope, Brooklyn, from the Michael A. Rawley American Legion Post, at 193 Ninth St., to the Old Stone House, on Fifth Ave. at 3rd St. On Aug. 22 at 12:30, the National Park Service ranger Mike Callahan gives a lecture at the Fraunces Tavern Museum (54 Pearl St.) about the strategic importance of New York City. An encampment of Colonial soldiers takes over Governors Island on Aug. 26, and on Aug. 27 there are marches, reënactments, and demonstrations in Green-Wood Cemetery (Fifth Ave. at 25th St., Brooklyn). Walking tours throughout the area are also planned. (For more information, call 718-768-3195, or visit www.theoldstonehouse.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
What does a **Christie's** mail clerk do in his time off? The midtown auctioneer offers a peek at its employees' true artistic affinities at its yearly Insider Art exhibition (through Aug. 24), which will include paintings, ceramics, photographs, and other forms of artistic expression by more than fifty staff members, from department heads to lowly interns. Some, but not all, of the art work will be up for sale. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Swann** serves up a sampler of books, photographs, posters, and prints, offered up in batches, or "shelves," at its annual Shelf Sale (Aug. 16); this year's edition focusses on all things nautical. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
HOLLIDAY SEASON
Aug. 25–31

The New York-born actress Judy Holliday wasn't dumb, she just played it, brilliantly, stealing "Adam's Rib" from Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy in 1949 and winning an Oscar as a bumptious girlfriend in "Born Yesterday." These works headline the Walter Reade Theatre's retrospective, along with "It Should Happen to You," in which Holliday stars as a model who seeks fame by appearing on billboards. (212-875-5600.)

ART
DIFFERENT DRUMMER
Sept. 9

Deitch Projects scheduled its second annual Art Parade to coincide with the start of the fall gallery season. Last year's parade had muscle cars, step dancers, floats, an ice-cream truck, hula hoopers, and extravagantly costumed marchers. Expect the same maximalist formula. (212-343-7300; www.deitch.com.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
MILES TO GO
Sept. 10

The seventeenth annual N.Y.C. Century Bike Tour gets under way next month. More than five thousand participants are expected for the ride, which is available in five lengths that range from fifteen miles (Central Park to Prospect Park) to a hundred miles (a route that traverses four out of the five boroughs). (www.nyccentury.org.)

NIGHT LIFE
NEW NEW WAVE
Sept. 19

Nouvelle Vague, a French group composed of two male producers and a bevy of young female singers, became a critical favorite last year as a result of its unique formula: giving a seductive bossa-nova spin to the dark songs of the post-punk era. The band comes to town for a show at Webster Hall. (212-353-1600.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BIRTHDAY BOY
Oct. 15

With the Mozart and Shostakovich anniversaries now ebbing, it's time to celebrate a living master. The Whitney Museum hosts "Steve Reich @ 70," a marathon concert featuring such seminal works as "New York Counterpoint." (www.whitney.org.)

Deitch Projects' second annual Art Parade.

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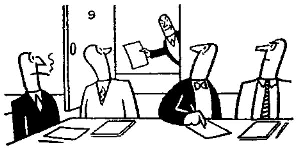
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
SNAKE EYES



On February 27, 1968, Walter Cronkite, the longtime anchorman of the CBS Evening News and the gruff but kindly voice of what was then called Middle America, signed off his broadcast on an unusual note. Freshly returned from Vietnam, where the Tet offensive had just ended, Cronkite offered what he called "an analysis that must be speculative, personal, subjective." "We have too often been disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds," he said. "To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic yet unsatisfactory conclusion." Like the famous issue of *Life* devoted to photographs of a week's worth of American dead, Cronkite's polite demurral came to symbolize the long migration of opposition to the war in Vietnam from the fringe—the campus firebrands, the radical clerics, the flowers-in-gun-barrels hippies, the papier-mâché puppeteers—to the wide, upholstered center of American political life.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The center of American politics is no longer as roomy (or as comfy) as it was then. The fringe, now luxuriant only at the rightmost edge of the political prayer rug, has gone online and wired itself for AM radio and cable TV. And nowhere in the cacophonous, atomized "media environment" of today is there anyone capable of deploying the wall-to-wall avuncular authority that was Cronkite's stock-in-trade. Even so, in this August of 2006 a palpable, '68-like shift in sentiment is in the steamy air. Among foreign-policy élites and the broader public alike, it has become the preponderant conviction that George W. Bush's war of choice in Iraq is a catastrophe.

"It is now obvious that we are not midwifing democracy in Iraq," Thomas L. Friedman wrote, in the August 4th edition of the *Times*. "We are baby-sitting a civil war." Friedman may not be another Walter Lippmann (just as any number of Stewarts, Olbermanns, O'Reillys, and Coopers don't quite add up to a Cronkite), but he is the most influential foreign-affairs columnist in the country, and from the beginning he has been a critical supporter of the war. His defection is a bellwether. "The Administration now has to admit what anyone—including myself—who believed in the importance of getting Iraq right has to admit," he wrote. "Whether for Bush reasons or Arab reasons, it is not happening, and we can't throw more good lives after good lives." In a Washington *Post* column a day earlier, the relentlessly centrist David S. Broder, citing his colleague Thomas E. Ricks's new book, "Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq," admitted that "the hope for victory is gone" and deplored "the answer from Bush," which he characterized this way: "Carry on. Do not waver. And do not question the logic of prolonging the agony."

That same week, a summing-up confidential cable by William Patey, the departing British Ambassador to Iraq, found its way into the newspapers. "The prospect of a low intensity civil war and a de facto division of Iraq is probably more likely at this stage than a successful and substantial transition to a stable democracy," Patey wrote to Prime Minister Tony Blair. "Even the lowered expectation of President Bush for Iraq—a government that can sustain itself, defend itself and govern itself and is an ally in the war on terror—must remain in doubt."

Asked about Patey's assessment during a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, General John P. Abizaid, the over-all American commander in the Middle East, replied carefully (Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was sitting next to him), "I believe that the sectarian violence is probably as bad as I've seen it, in Baghdad in particular, and that, if not stopped, it is possible that Iraq could move toward civil war." Last Monday, in an interview with ABC News, General George Casey, the top commander in Iraq for the past two years, agreed, saying that "the six last weeks or so have been the highest levels of sectarian violence that I've seen since I've been here" and that "a countrywide civil war" is "the most significant threat right now." (At a news conference that same day, President Bush himself weighed in on the subject: "You know, I hear people say, well, civil war this, civil war that." Well, at least he's listening. Or maybe just hearing.)

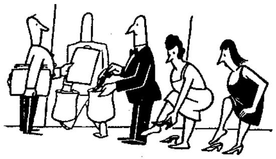
Three and a half years ago, on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, commentators across the board agreed that the coming war would be a gamble—"the greatest shake of the dice any President has voluntarily engaged in since Harry Truman dropped the bomb on Japan," Thomas Friedman called it. The metaphor came up again and again as the war approached. "This is the biggest gamble any President has taken in my lifetime," a foreign-policy specialist at the Heritage Foundation said. "By accident or design, President Bush has allowed Iraq to become the gamble of a lifetime," the Washington *Post* noted. Some viewed the gamble with apprehension. "Whatever this war's effect on the region, globally it may be an even bigger roll of the dice for the United States than either its proponents or critics have argued," Charles W. Freeman, Jr., who was the first President Bush's Ambassador to Saudia Arabia during the Gulf War, wrote. Others were thrilled by the audacity, the swagger, the sheer "High Noon" moral clarity of it all. "This is Texas poker, with the President putting everything on Iraq," a Republican senator told the columnist Robert Novak, with relish.

It is in the nature of gambling that the gamble may lose. The dice have now been well and truly rolled, and they have come up snake eyes. The war's sole real gain—the overthrow of the murderous Saddam Hussein regime—is mocked by the chaos and suffering that have overwhelmed millions of Iraqis, whose country is again a republic of fear. The concrete losses are horrific: nearly three thousand American and "coalition" troops killed; thousands more maimed; scores of thousands of Iraqi civilians dead; a third of a trillion dollars burned through. So are the less tangible ones: the unprecedented levels of anti-Americanism throughout the Muslim world and Europe; the self-inflicted loss of America's moral prestige; the neglect of real nuclear dangers, in Iran and North Korea, while chimeras were chased in Iraq. The neoconservative project of a friendly, democratic Middle East, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace, is worse than a charred ruin—it is a flaming inferno.

After the defeat of Joseph Lieberman in last week's senatorial primary in Connecticut, spokesmen for the Bush Administration and the Republican Party sought to portray the result as an expression of opposition to the struggle against Islamist terrorism. It was not. Virtually all those who voted against Lieberman, and many, probably most, of those who voted for him, oppose the Iraq war, as does a solid majority—sixty per cent, according to a CNN poll released last Wednesday—of the American public. But they oppose it because, among other reasons, they believe that it has harmed, not helped, that larger struggle. At the end of the week, after British authorities foiled what was evidently a large-scale plot to destroy transatlantic airliners and murder thousands of passengers, President Bush called the plot "a stark reminder that this nation is at war with Islamic fascists who will use any means to destroy those of us who love freedom." But the war in Iraq is wholly irrelevant to the means chosen by the London terrorists, and the means that thwarted them—dogged police work, lawful surveillance, international coöperation—are precisely those which have been gratuitously starved or stymied on account of the material, political, and human resources that have been, and continue to be, wasted in Iraq. Why not change the game to one that relies less on gambling and bluff and more on wisdom, planning, and (in every sense) intelligence?

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

HERE TO THERE
EVERY LAST DROP



"Do you get nervous about flying?" a man asked two women seated next to him, as they waited by the arrival gate at Kennedy Airport's Terminal 7, last Thursday afternoon. "You know, it's safer than any other form of transportation," he said. "You're more likely to have an accident in your own bathroom."

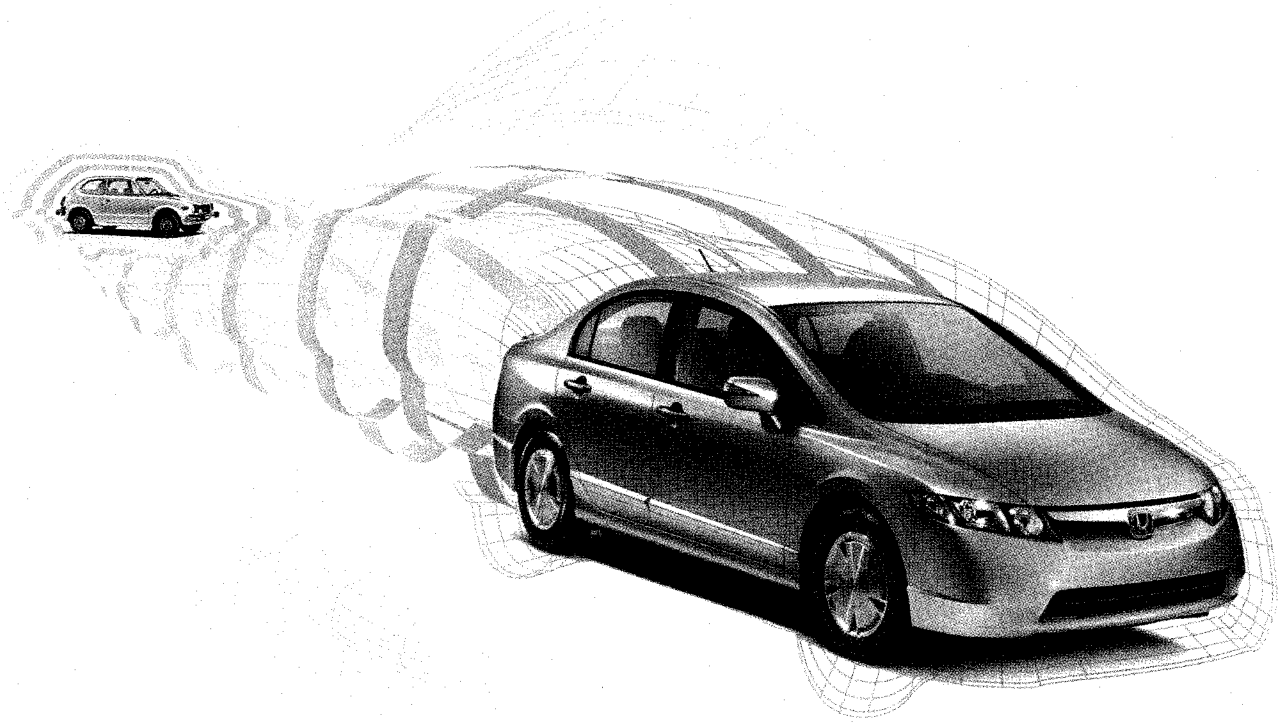
It was Day One of the newly re-upped security alert, in which the bathroom had suddenly become a kind of frequent flyer's red zone, a storeroom of forbidden goods: toothpaste, mouthwash, hair spray, hand cream, sunscreen, mascara, Visine, Clearasil, Old Spice. "No Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols" signs were posted throughout the airport, and by lunchtime nearly all departing travellers had heard the news, from England, of the latest foiled terrorist plot. Families clustered around large trash bins, chugging water and juice, as though hydrating before a desert crossing.

Around two o'clock, the first British Airways flight out of Heathrow touched down, several hours behind schedule. British authorities had prohibited not just liquids but carry-on luggage altogether, dispensing clear plastic bags for wallets and passports. Each new arrival offered an assessment of the experience—"very normal," "no drama," "I'm bored on *all* flights"—which suggested a stoic forbearance with the inconveniences of the post-September 11th world. About the worst casualty of the new policy was a Paddington Bear mug that one Connecticut mother had meant to bring back for her daughter. Meanwhile, a British couple, in scouring the airport bookstore (some non-potable items purchased beyond the checkpoint were allowed on board), had even scored a couple of unlikely winners: "Does Anything Eat Wasps?: And 101 Other Unsettling, Witty Answers to Questions You Never Thought You Wanted to Ask" and "Chance: A Guide to Gambling, Love, the Stock Market, and Just About Everything Else."

Graham Lyons, a sixty-six-year-old

Environmentology™

Honda thinking in action.



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HONDA
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*Based on 2006 EPA mileage estimates: 50 combined, 49 city/51 highway. Use for comparison purposes only. Actual mileage may vary.

©2006 American Honda Motor Co., Inc. environmentology.honda.com barrister from London, had been forced to stow his Sunday *Times* ("It's about the only thing I enjoy reading," he said) with his checked bags, and compensated by watching in-flight movies. "There was a terrible film called 'Mission: Impossible 3,' " he said. "Then there was quite a good Irish film. It was about what took place just after 1920. And there was a third film, which was so unmemorable—oh, yes, it was a bank heist, that's right, one that lost me halfway through." He added, "Most people were quiet, except for a group of dancers. They were having a whale of a time, enjoying themselves."

The dancers, from a coed group called Elite, ranged in age from twelve to twenty-one and had been up for nearly twenty-four hours, since leaving Cornwall, where they attend the Funky Feet Dance School. They wore matching T-shirts ("Good luck Elite"), which many of the girls had tied at the belly. "We're representing Great Britain at the hip-hop convention in the Bronx," one said. Another added that they were looking forward to meeting P. Diddy.

"The parents at home have been a hundred per cent stressing, of course," Fiona Barclay, their teacher, said. "And we're absolutely fine."

Over at Terminal 8, as the day wore on, the vigilance of some security officials seemed to falter. "No water," one guard, stationed at an American Airlines post, called out from time to time. "You don't got perfume, right?"

A man wearing a backpack ambled up, holding a half-eaten cookie. He spoke with a French accent. "I can smoking?" he said, bringing two fingers to his lips, and pointing beyond the metal detectors.

"Cigarettes? No, you got to go outside with that." An easy one.

"You got any shampoos, deodorants?" another guard asked, as a trio of Eastern Europeans approached. "Leave 'em here." She pointed at a plastic tray, where a stick of Right Guard lay beside some empty bottles. One of the Europeans, a young woman, looked confused. She lifted her elbows, sniffed, and proceeded through the checkpoint.

For the time being, at least, another series of impositions was being taken in stride, another potential crisis averted.

—*Ben McGrath*

EPIDEMIOLOGY DEPT.
THE VINEYARD FRACTURE

Even the leisure class has its occupational hazards: tennis elbow, hangovers, red tide, gout. The Palm Beach diarrhea outbreak of 1996 was the result of a bad crop of raspberries; a few weeks ago, off the coast of Bermuda, a sportsfisherman was impaled by a blue marlin as it vaulted across the stern of his boat. Now, from Martha's Vineyard, comes word of a new resort-town scourge. Dr. Rocco Monto, the island's only orthopedist, says that, over the past six years, more than six hundred people in the area have fractured their fifth metatarsals. (The fifth metatarsal is the bone that parallels the outer edge of the foot.) As Monto told Ian Fein, of the *Vineyard Gazette*, "We have the world's largest collection of these fractures, by an extraordinary amount." Fein had recently fractured *his* fifth metatarsal, coming down from a rebound in a game of hoops.

The Vineyard fracture

The metatarsal fracture was first diagnosed in 1902, by the surgeon Sir Robert Jones, who had hurt his foot at a garden party while skipping around a Maypole. The Jones fracture, as it came to be called, occurs near the ankle end of the bone, and befalls dancers and soccer players (the metatarsal is known in England as "the Beckham bone"); the Vineyard fracture, meanwhile, is an avulsion fracture—the ankle twists, jerking the connecting tendon and a piece of bone away from the foot—and afflicts an athlete of a different sort. "Many of them are people who are getting off their decks, usually after dinner, usually after a couple of glasses of wine, and the steps are not quite so easy to negotiate," Monto said the other day, from his office in West Tisbury.

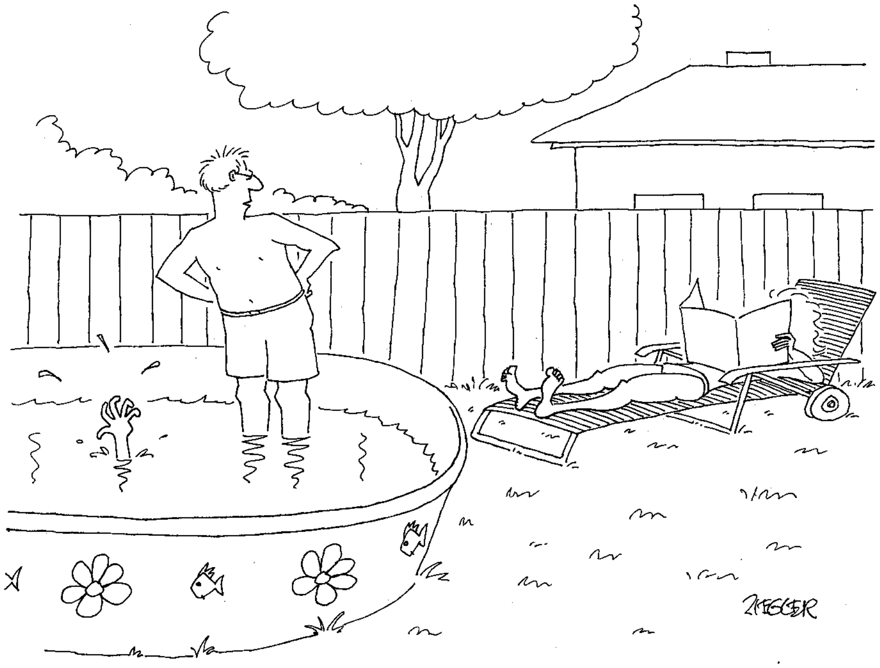
Still, it's tough to chalk up those figures to sauvignon blanc alone. Two summers ago, Monto presented his data to the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society. (Monto, who was trained at N.Y.U. and Duke, prefers to set the foot in a short, removable walking boot instead of the traditional cast. He has submitted his research for publication in the *Journal of Foot and Ankle Surgery*.) "The professor who reviewed the paper—I guess he thought I was making the data up—sat up on the podium," Monto said, "and asked, 'What's going on? Are they just klutzes over there?' "

If the epidemic is indeed attributable to some regional lack of coördination, then Vineyarders have taken oafishness to almost artistic heights. "It's amazing the creativity with which people are able to generate these injuries," Monto said, having seen three new cases that day. Memorable methods include stepping back while taking photographs, engaging in jumping sports, walking on uneven streets, wearing clogs or sandals, playing soccer after a few beers, slipping on grass, riding a bike after several years' hiatus, and trying to stop your boat from hitting the dock with the edge of your foot. One woman broke her fifth metatarsal while getting off the ferry in Vineyard Haven. "That's got to be the worst," Monto said, giggling. "You don't even make it onto the island and you break your foot!" Monto has yet to come up with more than unscientific explanations for the phenomenon. He guesses that sand, booze, and topography play a part, as does, he said, "just an absolute loss of their minds when people come on holiday."

Even the locals—perhaps prone to the same sort of mass hysteria as their Salem forebears—are putting up impressive stats. According to Ian Fein, the *Gazette* reporter, three of the paper's ten newsroom employees have fractured their fifth metatarsals. "It's not just women in Lilly Pulitzer pants walking down brick side-walks in their high heels," he said. "I went to pick up my vegetables the other day at the market, and the farmer had one of those noticeable boot casts. I said, 'So, fifth metatarsal, eh?'" Dr. Monto said, "If you come to the Vineyard, just walk around. You'll see all these black boots, and those are my people."

The good news, for stumblebums in other locales, is that the injury doesn't necessarily require any care at all. The pain, if you can stand it, feels something like walking on a peanut. Often, the fracture heals itself. "Especially in New York, where you can't see a doctor for five weeks," Monto said. "By the time you can get in there, you probably just say 'Fine,' and skip the appointment."

—*Lauren Collins*

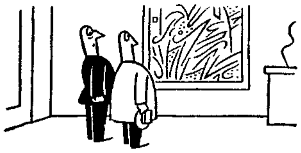


"I begged him to learn how to swim—but did he listen?"

• •

CONTRAPTIONS

BAD-ASS CAMERA



Three years ago, the artist Clifford Ross unveiled the R1, a still camera of his own design and construction—a Rube Goldberg assemblage of cadged and commissioned parts. Although it used film, it captured far more detail than any other camera, digital or not; the resolution was five hundred times as high as that of your run-of-the-mill digital point-and-click. In Ross's giant landscapes, you can make out the woodgrains on barn shingles thousands of feet away, and see mountain trails seven miles off. The pictures seem to be made not of pixels but of vision itself.

The subsequent curiosity and admiration of scientists turned Ross, who had previously made abstract paintings and photographs of ocean waves, into a congregator of technical minds—a high-res den leader—and before long he began conceiving a successor to the R1, which would draw on the expertise of his new genius friends, and, of course, enable him to make art.

Behold the R2. On one of those stifling days a couple of weeks ago, Ross took his new camera for an inaugural outing in Central Park. The test was in anticipation of its deployment, a few days later, to a wetlands preserve in southwestern Brazil, for a shoot—"a Fitzcarraldo kind of adventure," as Ross put it—arranged and underwritten by the Brazilian Foundation for Sustainable Development and the National Geographic Society. Ross and his team mustered at the south end of the Great Lawn and mounted the R2, along with a few crates of monitors and computers, on the bed of a Central Park Conservancy pickup truck. The R2 is a high-resolution digital video camera that shoots in three hundred and sixty degrees. Specifically, it is a bouquet of nine cameras, nine mirrors, and nine microphones, arrayed in a circle and mounted on a tripod; it resembles a lunar module, or an apocalyptic explosive device, but the sunbathers and ice-cream eaters paid it little mind, the heat amplifying their native nonchalance.

Ross, who is fifty-three, has a salty beard and a candy-shop smile, and wore a yellow ball cap from a bar in the Virgin Islands. Among his helpers were two filmmakers, brothers, from Tel Aviv, Liron and Tal Unreich. "We're trying to learn how to use the camera," Ross explained, standing in a shady spot as the Unreichs set up. "This is a dry run to learn how we can fail—are we missing a wire or do we need more apple crates to boost it up? There's no manual for the R2." Nor, frankly, is there a display system yet. What Ross has in mind is a cyclorama—a theatre in the round, which would, he hopes, vastly improve on the one at Epcot, which is twenty-four years old and, in Ross's view, "technically very unsatisfying."

The first shot of the day was a stationary one. After Ross made sure that the towers of the San Remo were visible over the trees, the crew crouched down by a monitor at the back of the truck. Someone brought Ross a padded beach chair. Action.

All nine views were displayed on the monitor. Passersby drifted from one square to the next, like thieves in a well-surveilled museum. A woman strolled by with a spotted Great Dane, squirting its back with a water bottle. A softball player grounded out to short. Two dozen day campers in matching yellow T-shirts moved past surprisingly quietly. A parks employee pulled up in a golf cart and said, "Y'all getting it?" Ross frowned and waved him on.

"The pace is so beautiful," he whispered.

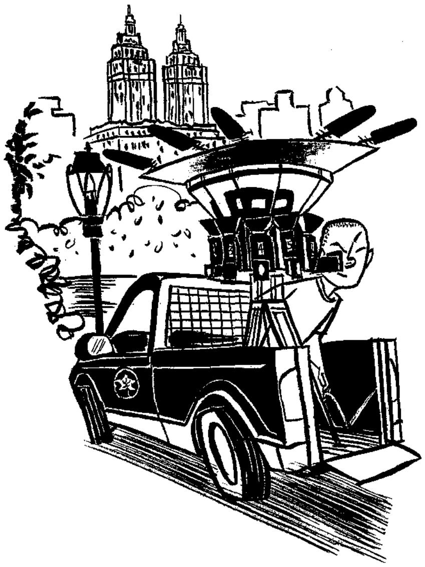
As they set up for the next shot, Ross talked about the camera's potential. "In some ways, this would be like a super-high-tech Advent calendar," he said. With its three-hundred-and-sixty-degree purview and its ability to see detail at great distances, the R2 would be able to capture thousands of little inadvertent dramas.

Ross's friend Walter Salles, who directed "The Motorcycle Diaries," and who first suggested the Brazil trip to him, coined the term "elective cinema": in the cyclorama you'd have to choose which section of the screen to watch. Ross pointed to the parapet of the Belvedere Castle, a couple of hundred yards away, and said, "Imagine if you could go over there and see, say, a murder, or two people falling in love—or have multiple narratives going on at once."

The next shot involved driving the truck forward and backward along the path, at a few miles per hour. Ross and the Unreichs hadn't accounted for the fact that the truck would beep while going backward. They were learning. Still, Ross was thrilled by the sight of a lamppost moving from shot to shot on the monitor. "That was really a mind-blower," he said.

"It took us two to three years of work to watch that lamppost move?" Tal Unreich said.

They spent an hour or more between shots, anyway, downloading the previous one and readjusting all the cameras for the next. (The R2 captures nine gigabytes of data per minute.) As the golden hour approached, the f-stop debates lengthened, along with the shadows. Ross and the Unreichs drove south to the Literary Walk, for a tracking shot under the elms. A guy smoking a cigar on a bench said, "You're gonna have to tell me what that is."



The R2

He was invited to hazard a guess.

"Looks like a bad-ass camera to me."

—*Nick Paumgarten*

SISTER CITIES

THE COOPER'S TALE

It is hereby noted that a cooper—a maker of wooden buckets, tubs, butter churns, and, above all, barrels—came to town a few weeks ago from Williamsburg, Virginia, for purposes of "cross-promotion," a distinctly modern concept that is nevertheless familiar to Williamsburg's Colonial citizenry. To honor the upcoming quadrennial celebration of the nearby Jamestown colony, the one-and-thirty-year-old cooper was installed beneath a tent at the South Street Seaport for several days, along with some of his compatriots, to entertain people with knowledge of practices and places obsolete. Competition was tough: the Williamsburghers had set up next to a Verizon booth, where people were distributing free pens, and a NASA booth, where you could get your picture taken in outer space. Still, the cooper made do, handing out curlicued wood shavings, and attracting his share of curious souls. "I met a Hasidic Jew yesterday," he said on the last day of his trip. "It turns out there are a lot of barrels that are mentioned in the Talmud."

But the cooper had other things on his mind. He and his wife had already visited the Metropolitan Museum, the Statue of Liberty, and Washington Square Park, where he played chess with a guy and lost fifteen dollars, but he had time for one more excursion. Feeling a pang of homesickness, he doffed his waistcoat and cravat, packed his barrels into a rented van, and, after some brief confusion getting out of downtown Manhattan, drove across the river to a different Williamsburg. (Same name, different namesake: Brooklyn's Williamsburg was named for Jonathan Williams, who surveyed the area; Virginia's was named for King William III.)

The cooper and his wife found a parking spot on Havemeyer Street and stopped at a bagel shop for lunch. The cooper looked up and pointed at a wooden water tower on a rooftop. "That's cooperage!" he said. "I think they're beautiful. I suppose to the average New Yorker they're an eyesore. Kind of archaic."

Coopers, he said, were indispensable in their heyday, when barrels served as the means for transporting such goods as meat, indigo, rice, and molasses. Making a barrel by hand is an intricate procedure that involves carving wooden staves at precise angles and then binding them with metal hoops. These days, barrels are manufactured mostly by machine. The Williamsburg cooper had settled on the trade after some dabbling—he was a fur trader, a French priest, a tobacco farmer, and a brickmaker at various historical sites before finding his true calling.

On Bedford Street, the cooper and his wife went into an apothecary. He surveyed the soap aisle; his wife bought a pack of Spree. Back on the street, they passed a branch of American Apparel and a few coffeehouses, but there was nary a wigmaker or a silversmith in sight. As for blacksmiths, the mere mention of them touched a nerve. "They're totally overromanticized!" the cooper said. "Especially since that British actor played a blacksmith in two different movies." (Orlando Bloom, in "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Kingdom of Heaven.") He looked despondent. "But, then, blacksmithing is sexy, with all the hammering and the hot metal. When you're carving staves, it's not as sexy."

"Well, it depends on what your definition of sexy is," the cooper's wife said.

The next stop was Mugs Ale House, which, lo and behold, had a decorative barrel in its back room. The cooper offered a critique. Pointing to one stave, he said, "This part here is pretty ugly. You see how the grain is really twisty?" Even in Colonial Williamsburg, he went on, barrels are not always regarded with the proper respect. "They use barrels as trash cans, because they don't disturb the ambience of the historical area. And a lot of them look just like this one—worse than this one!"

The cooper's wife realized that their parking meter was about to expire; it was time to leave this Williamsburg and start the journey back to the other one. The couple had been married just two weeks, and they had not taken a honeymoon. They said they were thinking of going to New Mexico later this year.

"I wanted to go to England and work with a cooper there, but she wouldn't let me," the cooper said.

—*Michael Schulman*

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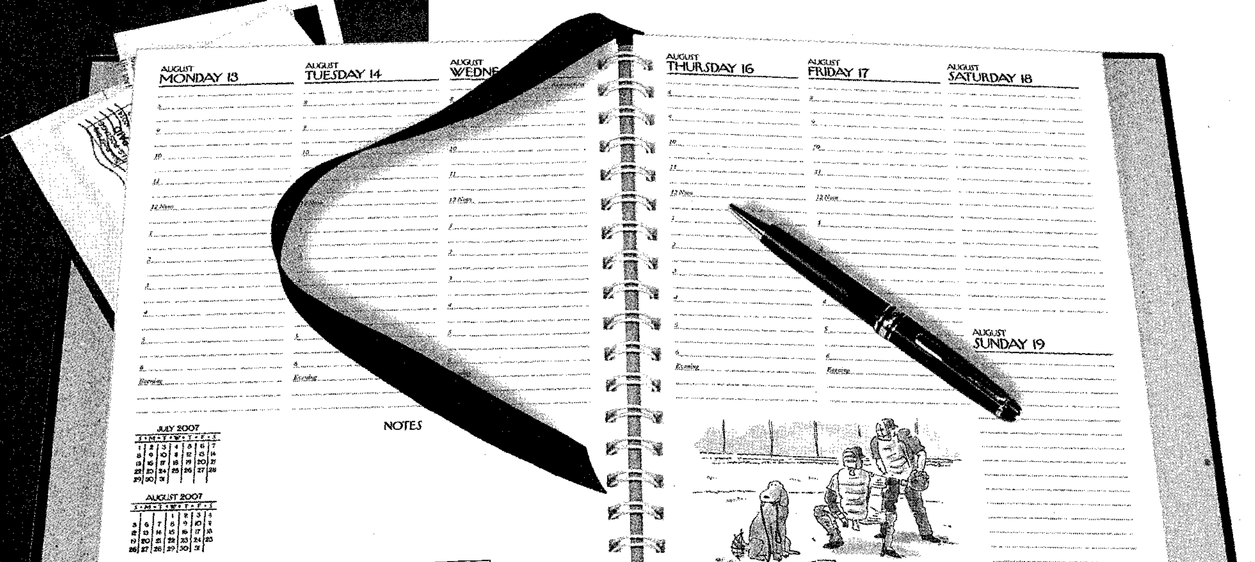
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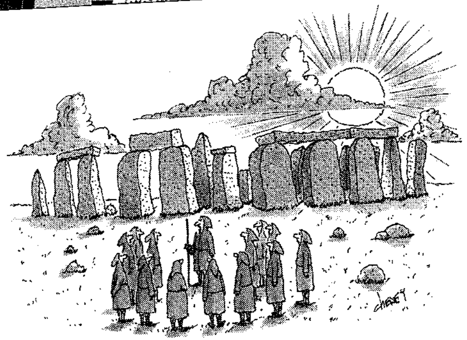

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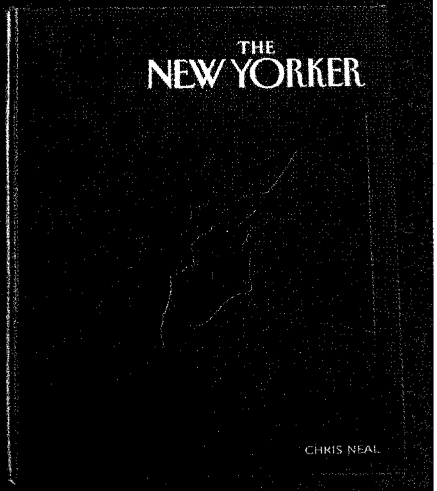
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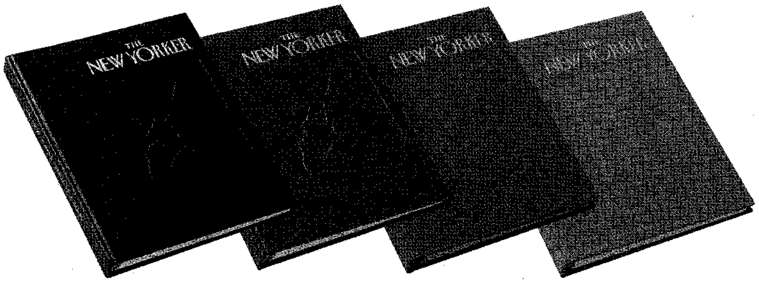
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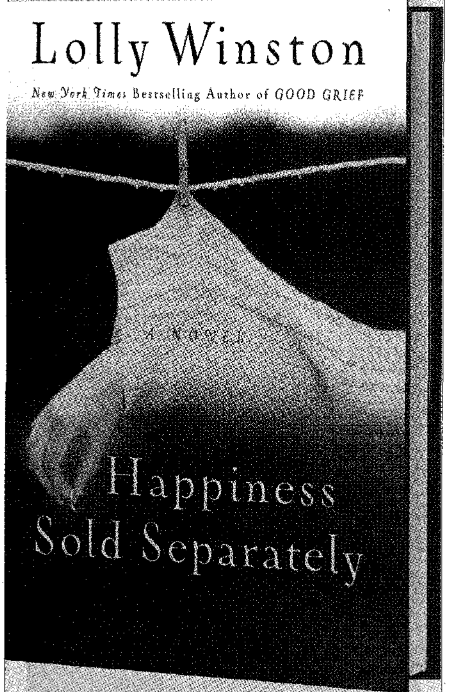
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ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

WATCHING LEBANON

Washington's interests in Israel's war.

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH

In the days after Hezbollah crossed from Lebanon into Israel, on July 12th, to kidnap two soldiers, triggering an Israeli air attack on Lebanon and a full-scale war, the Bush Administration seemed strangely passive. "It's a moment of clarification," President George W. Bush said at the G-8 summit, in St. Petersburg, on July 16th. "It's now become clear why we don't have peace in the Middle East." He described the relationship between Hezbollah and its supporters in Iran and Syria as one of the "root causes of instability," and subsequently said that it was up to those countries to end the crisis. Two days later, despite calls from several governments for the United States to take the lead in negotiations to end the fighting, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that a ceasefire should be put off until "the conditions are conducive."

The Bush Administration, however, was closely involved in the planning of Israel's retaliatory attacks. President Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney were convinced, current and former intelligence and diplomatic officials told me, that a successful Israeli Air Force bombing campaign against Hezbollah's heavily fortified underground-missile and command-and-control complexes in Lebanon could ease Israel's security concerns and also serve as a prelude to a potential American preëmptive attack to destroy Iran's nuclear installations, some of which are also buried deep underground.

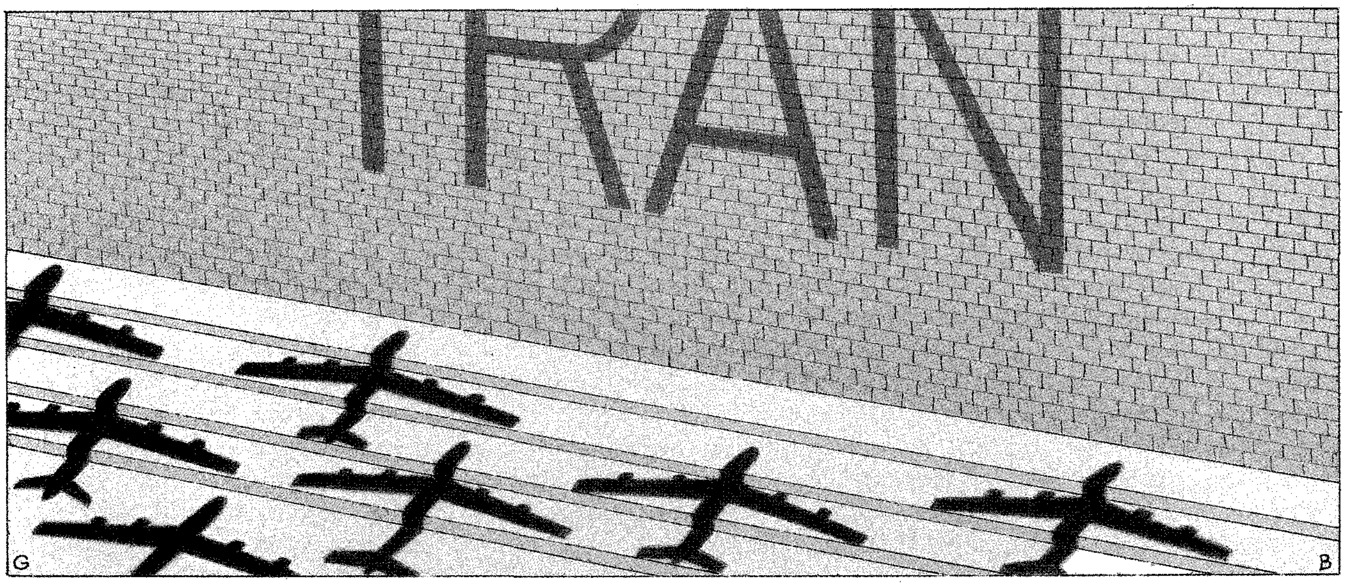
Israeli military and intelligence experts I spoke to emphasized that the country's immediate security issues were reason enough to confront Hezbollah, regardless of what the Bush Administration wanted. Shabtai Shavit, a national-security adviser to the Knesset who headed the Mossad, Israel's foreign-intelligence service, from 1989 to 1996, told me, "We do what we think is best for us, and if it happens to meet America's requirements, that's just part of a relationship between two friends. Hezbollah is armed to the teeth and trained in the most advanced technology of guerrilla warfare. It was just a matter of time. We had to address it."

Hezbollah is seen by Israelis as a profound threat—a terrorist organization, operating on their border, with a military arsenal that, with help from Iran and Syria, has grown stronger since the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon ended, in 2000. Hezbollah's leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, has said he does not believe that Israel is a "legal state." Israeli intelligence estimated at the outset of the air war that Hezbollah had roughly five hundred medium-range Fajr-3 and Fajr-5 rockets and a few dozen long-range Zelzal rockets; the Zelzals, with a range of about two hundred kilometres, could reach Tel Aviv. (One rocket hit Haifa the day after the kidnappings.) It also has more than twelve thousand shorter-range rockets. Since the conflict began, more than three thousand of these have been fired at Israel.

According to a Middle East expert with knowledge of the current thinking of both the Israeli and the U.S. governments, Israel had devised a plan for attacking Hezbollah—and shared it with Bush Administration officials—well before the July 12th kidnappings. "It's not that the Israelis had a trap that Hezbollah walked into," he said, "but there was a strong feeling in the White House that sooner or later the Israelis were going to do it."

The Middle East expert said that the Administration had several reasons for supporting the Israeli bombing campaign. Within the State Department, it was seen as a way to strengthen the Lebanese government so that it could assert its authority over the south of the country, much of which is controlled by Hezbollah. He went on, "The White House was more focussed on stripping

Hezbollah of its missiles, because, if there was to be a military option against Iran's nuclear facilities, it had to get rid of the weapons that Hezbollah could use in a potential retaliation at Israel. Bush wanted both. Bush was going after Iran, as part of the Axis of Evil, and its nuclear sites, and he was interested in going after Hezbollah as part of his interest in democratization, with Lebanon as one of the crown jewels of Middle East democracy."



If the U.S. wanted to deal with Iran's nuclear program militarily, the threat of Hezbollah's missiles had to be removed, an expert said.

GUY BILLOUT

Administration officials denied that they knew of Israel's plan for the air war. The White House did not respond to a detailed list of questions. In response to a separate request, a National Security Council spokesman said, "Prior to Hezbollah's attack on Israel, the Israeli government gave no official in Washington any reason to believe that Israel was planning to attack. Even after the July 12th attack, we did not know what the Israeli plans were." A Pentagon spokesman said, "The United States government remains committed to a diplomatic solution to the problem of Iran's clandestine nuclear weapons program," and denied the story, as did a State Department spokesman.

The United States and Israel have shared intelligence and enjoyed close military coöperation for decades, but early this spring, according to a former senior intelligence official, high-level planners from the U.S. Air Force—under pressure from the White House to develop a war plan for a decisive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities—began consulting with their counterparts in the Israeli Air Force.

"The big question for our Air Force was how to hit a series of hard targets in Iran successfully," the former senior intelligence official said. "Who is the closest ally of the U.S. Air Force in its planning? It's not Congo—it's Israel. Everybody knows that Iranian engineers have been advising Hezbollah on tunnels and underground gun emplacements. And so the Air Force went to the Israelis with some new tactics and said to them, 'Let's concentrate on the bombing and share what we have on Iran and what you have on Lebanon.'" The discussions reached the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, he said.

"The Israelis told us it would be a cheap war with many benefits," a U.S. government consultant with close ties to Israel said. "Why oppose it? We'll be able to hunt down and bomb missiles, tunnels, and bunkers from the air. It would be a demo for Iran."

A Pentagon consultant said that the Bush White House "has been agitating for some time to find a reason for a preëmptive blow against Hezbollah." He added, "It was our intent to have Hezbollah diminished, and now we have someone else doing it." (As this article went to press, the United Nations Security Council passed a ceasefire resolution, although it was unclear if it would change the situation on the ground.)

According to Richard Armitage, who served as Deputy Secretary of State in Bush's first term—and who, in 2002, said that Hezbollah "may be the A team of terrorists"—Israel's campaign in Lebanon, which has faced unexpected difficulties and widespread criticism, may, in the end, serve as a warning to the White House about Iran. "If the most dominant military force in the region—the Israel Defense Forces—can't pacify a country like Lebanon, with a population of four million, you should think carefully about taking that template to Iran, with strategic depth and a population of seventy million," Armitage said. "The only thing that the bombing has achieved so far is to unite the population against the Israelis."

Several current and former officials involved in the Middle East told me that Israel viewed the soldiers' kidnapping as the opportune moment to begin its planned military campaign against Hezbollah. "Hezbollah, like clockwork, was instigating something small every month or two," the U.S. government consultant with ties to Israel said. Two weeks earlier, in late June, members of Hamas, the Palestinian group, had tunnelled under the barrier separating southern Gaza from Israel and captured an Israeli soldier. Hamas also had lobbed a series of rockets at Israeli towns near the border with Gaza. In response, Israel had initiated an extensive bombing campaign and reoccupied parts of Gaza.

The Pentagon consultant noted that

there had also been cross-border incidents involving Israel and Hezbollah, in both directions, for some time. "They've been sniping at each other," he said. "Either side could have pointed to some incident and said 'We have to go to war with these guys'—because they were already at war."

David Siegel, the spokesman at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, said that the Israeli Air Force had not been seeking a reason to attack Hezbollah. "We did not plan the campaign. That decision was forced on us." There were ongoing alerts that Hezbollah "was pressing to go on the attack," Siegel said. "Hezbollah attacks every two or three months," but the kidnapping of the soldiers raised the stakes.

In interviews, several Israeli academics, journalists, and retired military and intelligence officers all made one point: they believed that the Israeli leadership, and not Washington, had decided that it would go to war with Hezbollah. Opinion polls showed that a broad spectrum of Israelis supported that choice. "The neocons in Washington may be happy, but Israel did not need to be pushed, because Israel has been wanting to get rid of Hezbollah," Yossi Melman, a journalist for the newspaper *Ha'aretz,* who has written several books about the Israeli intelligence community, said. "By provoking Israel, Hezbollah provided that opportunity."

"We were facing a dilemma," an Israeli official said. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert "had to decide whether to go for a local response, which we always do, or for a comprehensive response—to really take on Hezbollah once and for all." Olmert made his decision, the official said, only after a series of Israeli rescue efforts failed.

The U.S. government consultant with close ties to Israel told me, however, that, from Israel's perspective, the decision to take strong action had become inevitable weeks earlier, after the Israeli Army's signals intelligence group, known as Unit 8200, picked up bellicose intercepts in late spring and early summer, involving Hamas, Hezbollah, and Khaled Meshal, the Hamas leader now living in Damascus.

One intercept was of a meeting in late May of the Hamas political and military leadership, with Meshal participating by telephone. "Hamas believed the call from Damascus was scrambled, but Israel had broken the code," the consultant said. For almost a year before its victory in the Palestinian elections in January, Hamas had curtailed its terrorist activities. In the late May intercepted conversation, the consultant told me, the Hamas leadership said that "they got no benefit from it, and were losing standing among the Palestinian population." The conclusion, he said, was "'Let's go back into the terror business and then try and wrestle concessions from the Israeli government.'" The consultant told me that the U.S. and Israel agreed that if the Hamas leadership did so, and if Nasrallah backed them up, there should be "a full-scale response." In the next several weeks, when Hamas began digging the tunnel into Israel, the consultant said, Unit 8200 "picked up signals intelligence involving Hamas, Syria, and Hezbollah, saying, in essence, that they wanted Hezbollah to 'warm up' the north." In one intercept, the consultant said, Nasrallah referred to Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz "as seeming to be weak," in comparison with the former Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Barak, who had extensive military experience, and said "he thought Israel would respond in a small-scale, local way, as they had in the past."

Victoria Roberts

"As if we didn't already know too much about ourselves, we're having our DNA done."

Earlier this summer, before the Hezbollah kidnappings, the U.S. government consultant said, several Israeli officials visited Washington, separately, "to get a green light for the bombing operation and to find out how much the United States would bear." The consultant added, "Israel began with Cheney. It wanted to be sure that it had his support and the support of his office and the Middle East desk of the National Security Council." After that, "persuading Bush was never a problem, and Condi Rice was on board," the consultant said.

The initial plan, as outlined by the Israelis, called for a major bombing campaign in response to the next Hezbollah provocation, according to the Middle East expert with knowledge of U.S. and Israeli thinking. Israel believed that, by targeting Lebanon's infrastructure, including highways, fuel depots, and even the civilian runways at the main Beirut airport, it could persuade

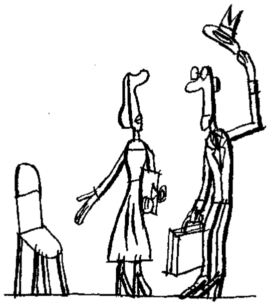
Lebanon's large Christian and Sunni populations to turn against Hezbollah, according to the former senior intelligence official. The airport, highways, and bridges, among other things, have been hit in the bombing campaign. The Israeli Air Force had flown almost nine thousand missions as of last week. (David Siegel, the Israeli spokesman, said that Israel had targeted only sites connected to Hezbollah; the bombing of bridges and roads was meant to prevent the transport of weapons.)

The Israeli plan, according to the former senior intelligence official, was "the mirror image of what the United States has been planning for Iran." (The initial U.S. Air Force proposals for an air attack to destroy Iran's nuclear capacity, which included the option of intense bombing of civilian infrastructure targets inside Iran, have been resisted by the top leadership of the Army, the Navy, and the Marine Corps, according to current and former officials. They argue that the Air Force plan will not work and will inevitably lead, as in the Israeli war with Hezbollah, to the insertion of troops on the ground.)

Uzi Arad, who served for more than two decades in the Mossad, told me that to the best of his knowledge the contacts between the Israeli and U.S. governments were routine, and that, "in all my meetings and conversations with government officials, never once did I hear anyone refer to prior coördination with the United States." He was troubled by one issue—the speed with which the Olmert government went to war. "For the life of me, I've never seen a decision to go to war taken so speedily," he said. "We usually go through long analyses."

The key military planner was Lieutenant General Dan Halutz, the I.D.F. chief of staff, who, during a career in the Israeli Air Force, worked on contingency planning for an air war with Iran. Olmert, a former mayor of Jerusalem, and Peretz, a former labor leader, could not match his experience and expertise.

In the early discussions with American officials, I was told by the Middle East expert and the government consultant, the Israelis repeatedly pointed to the war in Kosovo as an example of what Israel would try to achieve. The NATO forces commanded by U.S. Army General Wesley Clark methodically bombed and strafed not only military targets but tunnels, bridges, and roads, in Kosovo and elsewhere in Serbia, for seventy-eight days before forcing Serbian forces to withdraw from Kosovo. "Israel studied the Kosovo war as its role model," the government consultant said. "The Israelis told Condi Rice, 'You did it in about seventy days, but we need half of that—thirty-five days.' "



There are, of course, vast differences between Lebanon and Kosovo. Clark, who retired from the military in 2000 and unsuccessfully ran as a Democrat for the Presidency in 2004, took issue with the analogy: "If it's true that the Israeli campaign is based on the American approach in Kosovo, then it missed the point. Ours was to use force to obtain a diplomatic objective—it was not about killing people." Clark noted in a 2001 book, "Waging Modern War," that it was the threat of a possible ground invasion as well as the bombing that forced the Serbs to end the war. He told me, "In my experience, air campaigns have to be backed, ultimately, by the will and capability to finish the job on the ground."

Kosovo has been cited publicly by Israeli officials and journalists since the war began. On August 6th, Prime Minister Olmert, responding to European condemnation of the deaths of Lebanese civilians, said, "Where do they get the right to preach to Israel? European countries attacked Kosovo and killed ten thousand civilians. Ten thousand! And none of these countries had to suffer before that from a single rocket. I'm not saying it was wrong to intervene in Kosovo. But please: don't preach to us about the treatment of civilians." (Human Rights Watch estimated the number of civilians killed in the NATO bombing to be five hundred; the Yugoslav government put the number between twelve hundred and five thousand.)

Cheney's office supported the Israeli plan, as did Elliott Abrams, a deputy national-security adviser, according to several former and current officials. (A spokesman for the N.S.C. denied that Abrams had done so.) They believed that Israel should move quickly in its air war against Hezbollah. A former intelligence officer said, "We told Israel, 'Look, if you guys have to go, we're behind you all the way. But we think it should be sooner rather than later—the longer you wait, the less time we have to evaluate and plan for Iran before Bush gets out of office.' "

Cheney's point, the former senior intelligence official said, was "What if the Israelis execute their part of this first, and it's really successful? It'd be great. We can learn what to do in Iran by watching what the Israelis do in Lebanon."

The Pentagon consultant told me that intelligence about Hezbollah and Iran is being mishandled by the White House the same way intelligence had been when, in 2002 and early 2003, the Administration was making the case that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. "The big complaint now in the intelligence community is that all of the important stuff is being sent directly to the top—at the insistence of the White House—and not being analyzed at all, or scarcely," he said. "It's an awful policy and violates all of the N.S.A.'s strictures, and if you complain about it you're out," he said. "Cheney had a strong hand in this."

The long-term Administration goal was to help set up a Sunni Arab coalition—including countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt—that would join the United States and Europe to pressure the ruling Shiite mullahs in Iran. "But the thought behind that plan was that Israel would defeat Hezbollah, not lose to it," the consultant with close ties to Israel said. Some officials in Cheney's office and at the N.S.C. had become convinced, on the basis of private talks, that those nations would moderate their public criticism of Israel and blame Hezbollah for creating the crisis that led to war. Although they did so at first, they shifted their position in the wake of public protests in their countries about the Israeli bombing. The White House was clearly disappointed when, late last month, Prince Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, came to Washington and, at a meeting with Bush, called for the President to intervene immediately to end the war. The Washington *Post* reported that Washington had hoped to enlist moderate Arab states "in an effort to pressure Syria and Iran to rein in Hezbollah, but the Saudi move . . . seemed to cloud that initiative."

The surprising strength of Hezbollah's resistance, and its continuing ability to fire rockets into northern Israel in the face of the constant Israeli bombing, the Middle East expert told me, "is a massive setback for those in the White House who want to use force in Iran. And those who argue that the bombing will create internal dissent and revolt in Iran are also set back."

Nonetheless, some officers serving with the Joint Chiefs of Staff remain deeply concerned that the Administration will have a far more positive assessment of the air campaign than they should, the former senior intelligence official said. "There is no way that Rumsfeld and Cheney will draw the right conclusion about this," he said. "When the smoke clears, they'll say it was a success, and they'll draw reinforcement for their plan to attack Iran."

In the White House, especially in the Vice-President's office, many officials believe that the military campaign against Hezbollah is working and should be carried forward. At the same time, the government consultant said, some policymakers in the Administration have concluded that the cost of the bombing to Lebanese society is too high. "They are telling Israel that it's time to wind down the attacks on infrastructure."

Similar divisions are emerging in Israel. David Siegel, the Israeli spokesman, said that his country's leadership believed, as of early August, that the air war had been successful, and had destroyed more than seventy per cent of Hezbollah's medium- and long-range-missile launching capacity. "The problem is short-range missiles, without launchers, that can be shot from civilian areas and homes," Siegel told me. "The only way to resolve this is ground operations—which is why Israel would be forced to expand ground operations if the latest round of diplomacy doesn't work." Last week, however, there was evidence that the Israeli government was troubled by the progress of the war. In an unusual move, Major General Moshe Kaplinsky, Halutz's deputy, was put in charge of the operation, supplanting Major General Udi Adam. The worry in Israel is that Nasrallah might escalate the crisis by firing missiles at Tel Aviv. "There is a big debate over how much damage Israel should inflict to prevent it," the consultant said. "If Nasrallah hits Tel Aviv, what should Israel do? Its goal is to deter more attacks by telling Nasrallah that it will destroy his country if he doesn't stop, and to remind the Arab world that Israel can set it back twenty years. We're no longer playing by the same rules."

A European intelligence officer told me, "The Israelis have been caught in a psychological trap. In earlier years, they had the belief that they could solve their problems with toughness. But now, with Islamic martyrdom, things have changed, and they need different answers. How do you scare people who love martyrdom?" The problem with trying to eliminate Hezbollah, the intelligence officer said, is the group's ties to the Shiite population in southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and Beirut's southern suburbs, where it operates schools, hospitals, a radio station, and various charities.

A high-level American military planner told me, "We have a lot of vulnerability in the region, and we've talked about some of the effects of an Iranian or Hezbollah attack on the Saudi regime and on the oil infrastructure." There is special concern inside the Pentagon, he added, about the oil-producing nations north of the Strait of Hormuz. "We have to anticipate the unintended consequences," he told me. "Will we be able to absorb a barrel of oil at one hundred dollars? There is this almost comical thinking that you can do it all from the air, even when you're up against an irregular enemy with a dug-in capability. You're not going to be successful unless you have a ground presence, but the political leadership never considers the worst case. These guys only want to hear the best case."

There is evidence that the Iranians were expecting the war against Hezbollah. Vali Nasr, an expert on Shiite Muslims and Iran, who is a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and also teaches at the Naval Postgraduate School, in Monterey, California, said, "Every negative American move against Hezbollah was seen by Iran as part of a larger campaign against it. And Iran began to prepare for the showdown by supplying more sophisticated weapons to Hezbollah—anti-ship and anti-tank missiles—and training its fighters in their use. And now Hezbollah is testing Iran's new weapons. Iran sees the Bush Administration as trying to marginalize its regional role, so it fomented trouble."

Nasr, an Iranian-American who recently published a study of the Sunni-Shiite divide, entitled "The Shia Revival," also said that the Iranian leadership believes that Washington's ultimate political goal is to get some international force to act as a buffer—to physically separate Syria and Lebanon in an effort to isolate and disarm Hezbollah, whose main supply route is through Syria. "Military action cannot bring about the desired political result," Nasr said. The popularity of Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a virulent critic of Israel, is greatest in his own country. If the U.S. were to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, Nasr said, "you may end up turning Ahmadinejad into another Nasrallah—the rock star of the Arab street."

Donald Rumsfeld, who is one of the Bush Administration's most outspoken, and powerful, officials, has said very little publicly about the crisis in Lebanon. His relative quiet, compared to his aggressive visibility in the run-up to the Iraq war, has prompted a debate in Washington about where he stands on the issue.

Some current and former intelligence officials who were interviewed for this article believe that Rumsfeld disagrees with Bush and Cheney about the American role in the war between Israel and Hezbollah. The U.S. government consultant with close ties to Israel said that "there was a feeling that Rumsfeld was jaded in his approach to the Israeli war." He added, "Air power and the use of a few Special Forces had worked in Afghanistan, and he tried to do it again in Iraq. It was the same idea, but it didn't work. He thought that Hezbollah was too dug in and the Israeli attack plan would not work, and the last thing he wanted was another war on his shift that would put the American forces in Iraq in greater jeopardy.”

A Western diplomat said that he understood that Rumsfeld did not know all the intricacies of the war plan. “He is angry and worried about his troops” in Iraq, the diplomat said. Rumsfeld served in the White House during the last year of the war in Vietnam, from which American troops withdrew in 1975, “and he did not want to see something like this having an impact in Iraq.” Rumsfeld’s concern, the diplomat added, was that an expansion of the war into Iran could put the American troops in Iraq at greater risk of attacks by pro-Iranian Shiite militias.

At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on August 3rd, Rumsfeld was less than enthusiastic about the war’s implications for the American troops in Iraq. Asked whether the Administration was mindful of the war’s impact on Iraq, he testified that, in his meetings with Bush and Condoleezza Rice, “there is a sensitivity to the desire to not have our country or our interests or our forces put at greater risk as a result of what’s taking place between Israel and Hezbollah. . . . There are a variety of risks that we face in that region, and it’s a difficult and delicate situation.”

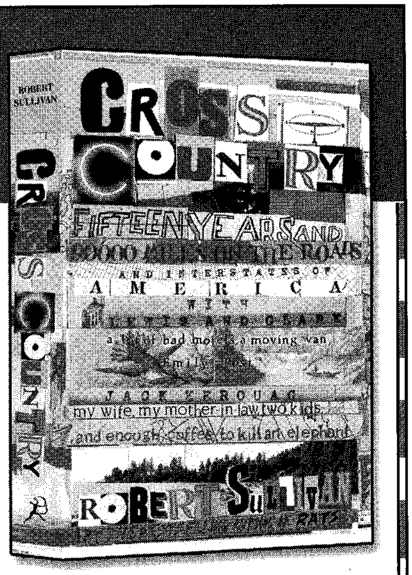
The Pentagon consultant dismissed talk of a split at the top of the Administration, however, and said simply, “Rummy is on the team. He’d love to see Hezbollah degraded, but he also is a voice for less bombing and more innovative Israeli ground operations.” The former senior intelligence official similarly depicted Rumsfeld as being “delighted that Israel is our stalking horse.”

There are also questions about the status of Condoleezza Rice. Her initial support for the Israeli air war against Hezbollah has reportedly been tempered by dismay at the effects of the attacks on Lebanon. The Pentagon consultant said that in early August she began privately “agitating” inside the Administration for permission to begin direct diplomatic talks with Syria—so far, without much success. Last week, the *Times* reported that Rice had directed an Embassy official in Damascus to meet with the Syrian foreign minister, though the meeting apparently yielded no results. The *Times* also reported that Rice viewed herself as “trying to be not only a peacemaker abroad but also a mediator among contending parties” within the Administration. The article pointed to a divide between career diplomats in the State Department and “conservatives in the government,” including Cheney and Abrams, “who were pushing for strong American support for Israel.”

The Western diplomat told me his embassy believes that Abrams has emerged as a key policymaker on Iran, and on the current Hezbollah-Israeli crisis, and that Rice’s role has been relatively diminished. Rice did not want to make her most recent diplomatic trip to the Middle East, the diplomat said. “She only wanted to go if she thought there was a real chance to get a ceasefire.”

Bush’s strongest supporter in Europe continues to be British Prime Minister Tony Blair, but many in Blair’s own Foreign Office, as a former diplomat said, believe that he has “gone out on a particular limb on this”—especially by accepting Bush’s refusal to seek an immediate and total ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah. “Blair stands alone on this,” the former diplomat said. “He knows he’s a lame duck who’s on the way out, but he buys it”—the Bush policy. “He drinks the White House Kool-Aid as much as anybody in Washington.” The crisis will really start at the end of August, the diplomat added, “when the Iranians”—under a United Nations deadline to stop uranium enrichment—“will say no.”

Even those who continue to support Israel’s war against Hezbollah agree that it is failing to achieve one of its main goals—to rally the Lebanese against Hezbollah. “Strategic bombing has been a failed military concept for ninety years, and yet air forces all over the world keep on doing it,” John Arquilla, a defense analyst at the Naval Postgraduate School, told me. Arquilla has been campaigning for more than a decade, with growing success, to change the way America fights terrorism. “The warfare of today is not mass on mass,” he said. “You have to hunt like a network to defeat a network. Israel focussed on bombing against Hezbollah, and, when that did not work, it became more aggressive on the ground. The definition of insanity is continuing to do the same thing and expecting a different result.” ◆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SHOUTS & MURMURS

STATIONS OF THE MEL

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Mel Is Condemned by the Press. Mel is pulled over by a centurion for driving his chariot at great speed, and accused of having a blood-alcohol level exceeding that mandated by Tiberius. "Arrest me not," he telleth the centurion, "for I owneth Malibu. And thou lookest a bit Jewish unto me." Sayeth the centurion, "Tell it to the procurator."

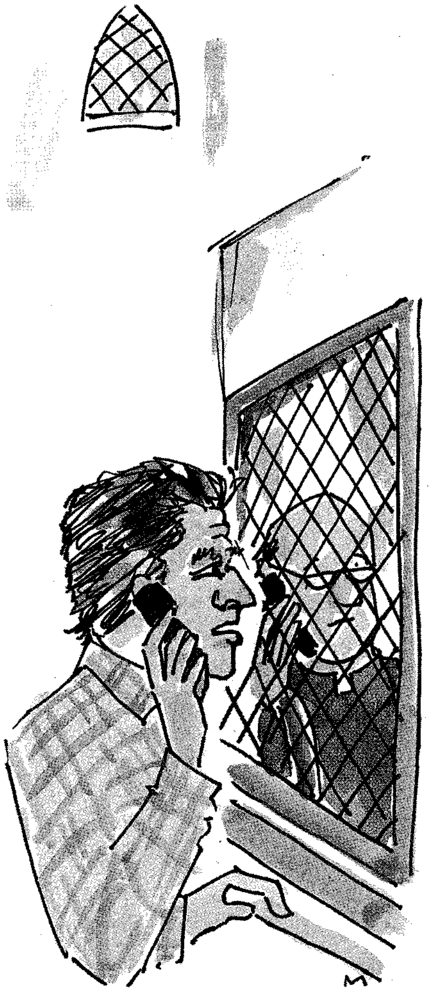
Mel Is Fingerprinted and Has His Mug Shot Taken. Mel calleth his lawyers, agents, and celebrity crisis managers and sayeth unto them, "I have opened my mouth and stirred up the Jews." His lawyers, agents, and crisis managers sayeth, "Yet *we* are Jews." Mel sayeth, "Thou didst *not* look Jewish when I was besotted with drink. Even so, gettest me out of this place of desolation."

Mel Falls the First Time. ABC, one of the sons of Disney, a Jew, cancelleth Mel's documentary on the Holocaust, a fiction wherein the Jews claim to be pestered by Germans. ABC announceth, "Whereupon we hath interest in this project, we thereupon now hath none," and refereth all calls to its press agent, another Jew, for Hollywood *is* full of them.

Mel Meets His Mother. His mother sayeth, "What hast thou done, that thy father *is* proud of thee? He yelpeth for joy." Mel sayeth, "The Jews have started this war, as they have all the wars." Mel's mother sayeth, "Verily, thou hast started *this* war, thou idiot." Mel sayeth, "Bring ice for my head, for it throbbeth."

Mel's Agents and Crisis Managers Take Up His Cross. "He repenteth mightily of what he hath said," they say to the Press, "and hath entered unto the land of Rehab, there to rend his garments and gnash his teeth and donate to B'nai B'rith."

Mel's Face Is Wiped by Veronica in the Greenroom. Whilst waiting to be interviewed by the Jew Larry King, Mel hath his face smeared by Veronica, a makeup artist. His visage miraculously remaineth on a baby wipe.



Mel Falls the Second Time. Whilst being interviewed by the Jew Larry King, Mel's breath reeketh of alcohol. He sayeth on live television that he doth not like Jews, even those who maketh him rich unto the seventy-seventh generation. Larry breaketh to a commercial, during

MICHAEL CRAWFORD

which Mel's handlers sayeth unto him, "Art thou *trying* to give us ulcers?" They calleth for duct tape to be applied to Mel's mouth.

Mel Meets the Women of Hollywood. On Rodeo Drive, Mel steppeth out of his Lexus and sayeth unto the women, "Shoppest thou not, nor giveth money unto the Jews, for they owneth enough as it is." The women commence with a great keening, which is heard even unto the Ivy and Mr. Chow, favored nosheries of the Jews, wherein they drink the blood of Christian babies and eat eggroll.

Mel Falls the Third Time. His public-relations crisis manager telleth him, "We are in the Land of Very Deep Doo-Doo, wherefromunto it ith difficult to extricate." Mel sayeth, "If another centurion pulleth me over, I shall say unto him, 'Shalom,' and kiss his hiney."

Mel Is Stripped of His Deals. Disney calleth him and sayeth, "Truly thou art radioactive, though we *would* distribute thy new movie, 'Apocalypto.'" Mel replyeth, "I *am* Apocalypto." Mel offereth to change the name of his movie to "Fiddler on the Roof II."

Mel Is Crucified by the Critics. "Fiddler on the Roof II" receiveth pans from the critics, who take umbrage that ninth-century-A.D. Mayans spouteth dialogue denouncing Adolf Hitler.

Mel Dies on the Cross. "Fiddler II" taketh in fewer shekels than "Judas Libre," in which Judas Iscariot, a Jew, playeth a kickboxing apostle who developeth a crush upon Mary Magdalene.

Mel Is Dropped by Disney. Disney cryeth out, "Why did we bankroll thou to make a movie about Guatemalans dipped in flour? Who green-lighted this abomination? Let him be brought forth that he may be recircumcised *without* Novocain."

Mel Rises from the Grave. Mel emergeth from Rehab and proclaimeth that his best friends *are* Jews, yet he addeth, "I met none in Rehab, for they hath not time to drink, being busy in the starting of wars." His spokesperson proclaimeth, "Oy," and fainteth. ♦

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THE SPORTING SCENE

BLANK MONDAY

Could Grubby Clark destroy surfing?

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

Gordon (Grubby) Clark did not invent the modern surfboard. It just began to seem that way, as the decades passed and his company, Clark Foam, of Laguna Niguel, California, founded in 1961, came to dominate the production of the polyurethane-foam "blank"—the lightweight alabaster core without which there would be no modern surfboard. For many people, Clark Foam and surfboards became conceptually inseparable. Clark's monopoly was estimated, as of last year, to cover ninety per cent of the American market and sixty per cent of the world market. The surfing press routinely described him as its industry's Bill Gates—or, because he was eccentric, reclusive, and rich, as surfing's Howard Hughes. In 2002, *Surfer*, the leading American surf magazine, published a list of the "25 Most Powerful People in Surfing." It put Clark at No. 2, behind Bob McKnight, the head of Quiksilver, a surfwear company. Clark hasn't granted an interview in more than thirty years, but the piece was accompanied by his photograph. It showed an older man in a Hawaiian-print shirt, with his face hidden by sunglasses, and two burly forearms, two big fists, and, directly in front of his eyes, two thick middle fingers raised at the camera.

When Clark, who is now seventy-three, started surfing, in the early nineteen-fifties, there were perhaps two hundred surfers in California. "We slept on the beach, drank wine, chased girls, ate abalone and lobster that we caught ourselves, worked some odd jobs, but mostly, if there were waves, we surfed," recalled Dick Metz, one of Clark's oldest friends and the first employee of Clark Foam. Today, the world's surf population is said to exceed twenty million. Although most surfers have never had much money, Clark single-mindedly built a company that's estimated to be worth as much as forty million dollars.

Then, on December 5, 2005, Clark, with no warning, faxed a seven-page letter to his customers announcing, "Effective immediately Clark Foam is ceasing production and sales of surfboard blanks." He alluded to run-ins with government regulators, primarily over the chemicals and equipment he used, and to claims filed against him by ex-employees or their survivors: "I may be looking at very large fines, civil lawsuits, and even time in prison." His equipment, most of which he had invented, could never, by definition, meet the government's standards, he wrote. Indeed, "for the majority of my equipment and process I am the 'standard.'" To Clark, this implied a limitless liability. In any case, he was done trying to satisfy the government. "When Clark Foam was started, it was a far different California," he wrote, and went on:

Professional surfers take big chances, in powerful waves, and may break any number of boards in a season. Photograph by Tom Servais.

> The only apology I will make to customers and employees is that I should have seen this coming many years sooner and closed years ago in a slower, more predictable manner. . . . My full-time efforts will be to extract myself from the mess that I have created for myself.

It was not entirely clear what he was talking about, even to industry experts. None of the relevant regulatory agencies were taking any known action against him. But Clark began dismantling his plant immediately and, soon afterward, destroying much of his irreplaceable equipment. He ordered his workers to smash his eighty-odd concrete master blank molds—all of them based on designs provided by the world's best shapers. (Shapers are the craftsmen who turn blanks into surfboards, ready for glassing.) Luis Barajas, who worked for Clark for thirty-two years and was his wood-mill foreman, told me, "Mr. Clark told us to cut up the glue presses, with torches." Clark seemed unable to watch, Barajas said, and he walked away. "It was hard for us, too." Surfers made pilgrimages to the concrete recycling plant where the broken molds were dumped—piled askew, like huge robbed caskets. A local shaper could still identify, for his companions, which molds had produced the blanks for boards that were ridden to world championships.

Rage and disbelief roiled the American surfboard business. Many shapers didn't know where their next blanks would come from. Glassers, sanders, and salespeople would all be unemployed; the price of boards would double. The age of the handmade board was over. Clark alone had been keeping the Chinese, and multinational corporations, out of surfing. Many surfers were convinced that they would now be riding clunky mass-produced plastic boards, waiting for somebody to rediscover how to blow foam as well as Clark had. How could an entire industry have relied on a single supplier? The cover of *Surfer* carried, instead of the usual colorful surf shot, a stark image of two white blanks, one unshaped and one shaped, against a black background, with the caption "This Changes Everything." December 5th became known as Blank Monday.

Clark got his start working as a laminator for Hobie Alter, who had been making balsa-wood-and-fibreglass boards in his parents' garage in Laguna Beach since he was a teen-ager. In 1954, Alter

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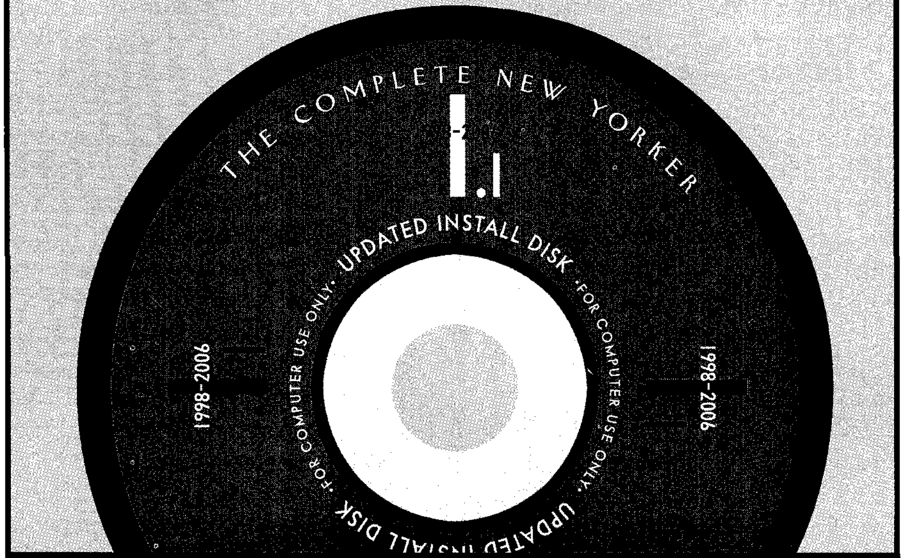

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opened Hobie Surfboards, one of the first surf shops, along a quiet stretch of the Pacific Coast Highway a few miles south of Laguna. He hired Clark about three years later. Clark and Alter were devoted surfers, but they also shared a certain intensity on land. "Most of us seemed to take a long time to grow up," Metz said. "But they were already there." Clark had a real job, in the oil fields of Huntington Beach, a gritty town twenty miles north, but drove back after work to Alter's shop, where he slept in an old pickup truck. Both men knew well the drawbacks of balsa wood, the standard core at the time. It soaked up water like a sponge through any crack in a board's fibreglass skin, and the supply was unreliable: balsa came from Ecuador, and Southern California's airplane builders were buying up most of the better wood for use in their planes' skins. Board builders had experimented with Styrofoam and other plastics, but none had proved practical. Then Alter began working with a rigid form of polyurethane, a lightweight foam. "And I thought, By God, this is really it," he told me recently.

Clark, who had a strong background in engineering—he had studied math, physics, and chemistry at Pomona College—saw polyurethane's potential immediately. "Grubby had a really deep mechanical brain," Reynolds Yater, another early Laguna surfer and shaper, told me. Alter rented a shed in Laguna Canyon and installed Clark there. They painted the windows black to keep the project secret. It was frustrating work, with far more setbacks than successes, but after six months or so they began to produce blanks that Alter could plane and fine-sand into surfboards that were better than balsa. In June, 1958, they put their first foam-core board on the market.

They were just in time for a national surf craze, inspired by the movie "Gidget." In 1961, Alter and Clark realized that to increase production Clark would need bigger equipment, and to pay for the machines he would need to start selling to other boardmakers. Clark bought a few tools from Alter, built a new plant, deep in the ranchlands of the Laguna Hills, and formed his own company, Clark Foam.

There was still a lot to learn. Foam blanks, for example, need stringers—strips of wood down their centers, for strength—but sawing them in half wasn't working, Metz told me. "So Grubby came up with the idea of a hot wire. He put electricity through this very taut wire, got it red-hot. Then we tried to run a blank through it, and the wire snapped. We were in shorts, barefoot, diving for cover—that wire would take your head off if it caught you in the neck. We kept trying to make a better wire, but it kept breaking. We had wires whipping around every other day. Finally, we got it right."

The basic design quest was (and is) for greater lightness without loss of strength—for a faster, more maneuverable, more responsive surfboard. In the midst of the sixties craze, some companies from outside the surfing world began to make molded boards. These were crude knockoffs, and although they were inexpensive, surf shops refused to carry them. They were sold, instead, at Sears and Montgomery Ward, and bought only by the clueless. Serious surfers wanted to ride the same boards that the top riders—featured in magazines and surf movies—rode. A real surfboard was hand-shaped and hand-glassed, and could be made only by a surfer.

I started surfing in the mid-sixties and, though fairly clueless myself, I knew enough not to go near a "pop-out"—a mass-produced, molded board. I first got a good look at pop-outs on the beach at Waikiki, where they were rented to tourists. They were huge, indestructible pink-and-white beasts. They seemed more related to barges or scows than to surfboards. The first board I bought, when I was eleven years old, was secondhand, but it came from Dave Sweet, a reputable builder. My next board, financed by weed-pulling, was made for me, and cost a hundred and twenty dollars. I ordered it, carefully specifying the length, the tail width, the color, and anything else I could think to specify, from Larry Felker, a shaper in my Southern California home town, and then prayed that it would arrive in less than six months.

Felker was a celebrity in my adolescent world, though his company was, in truth, just a half step above a garage operation. Even the big boardmakers, with shops on the Coast Highway, were only a couple of steps above the garages. But the difference in price between a factory-made knockoff and a top-of-the-line custom board was surprisingly small. That was in part because the shapers and other surfer-workers were so poorly paid—an exploitation relieved, in theory, by the unquantifiable benefit of working in the coolest possible industry. (Also, when the surf was good nobody was really expected to show up at work.) Boardmakers believed, moreover, that if they raised their prices surfers would just go down the street. Despite the sport's popularity, nobody was getting rich selling surfboards. Gordon Clark, however, was doing very well making blanks.

"Blowing foam is a black art," Bill Bahne told me. Bahne, a sun-browned, cheerful man who seems to have carefully divided his time, over a long career, between the surf and running various factories, is chairman of the board builders' group at the Surf Industry Manufacturers Association. He went on, "If the sun is out, your foam will come out different. Humidity is crucial. Gordon tried to control all the variables, at huge expense. Even the big chemical companies that make the raw materials—Bayer, BASF—couldn't make foam as good as Clark's."

To make a blank, the main components of polyurethane are mixed together and poured into a two-and-a-half-ton concrete mold, roughly surfboard-shaped, where they froth and rapidly expand. Innumerable things can go wrong—air bubbles, soft spots, hard spots, pour streaks. Clark's tinkering was meticulous and tireless. Much was made of his "formula," which he refined constantly. He also wrote long, fantastically detailed manuals for his workforce, which grew to more than a hundred. In an interview with an obscure surf magazine in 1972—the last formal interview I've been able to find—Clark said, "It takes a long time to develop your particular process and it's just a lot of little two-bit tricks." He added, "There's no romanticism in foam. . . . It's dirty, messy, and it's hard work."

It's also hazardous. Clark made his own resins, in a polyol reactor, from isocyanates that he bought by the ton. Bill Bahne told me, "That polyol reactor was like an A-bomb. You really wouldn't want to have a reactor without the safeguards and knowledge that Gordon had." Bahne, contemplating starting a foam-blank company himself, once showed part of Clark's polyurethane formula to polymer chemists at a major company. "And they said, 'This is dangerous. This is for a guy who can drive an eight-thousand-horsepower dragster.' Gordon could do it. But these polychemists said, 'No way. Do *not*.'"

Of the blanks produced by the various early manufacturers, Clark's were not the easiest to work with. Chuck Foss made big, soft, powdery blanks that shaped like butter but lacked strength. Harold Walker's were creamy, spongy, and a pleasure to have in the shaping bay. "Grubby's blanks were brittle, and mean to work," one early shaper told me. "But they had the best cell structure: small and tight. And he listened to shapers."

Clark could be morbidly competitive. Don Hansen, an early boardmaker in Encinitas, once hired two Clark ex-employees to help him make his own blanks. Clark sued Hansen. In the small community of boardmakers, people were appalled. Hansen won the case, and Clark did not lose gracefully. Until then, he had sold his blanks exclusively to the established boardmakers. Now, in his view, they had betrayed him by moving into his niche. His revenge was to start selling blanks to anyone—amateurs, garage shapers, kids—at the same low price he charged big customers.

Clark also started punishing disloyal customers. If his deliverymen spotted someone else's blanks in the racks outside a shaper's bay, the boardmaker would hear about it. "His drivers would say, 'Hey, you got some oddball blanks in here. What's going on?'" a second-generation California boardmaker told me. "And maybe you'd get a call from Grubby, or somebody else at Clark Foam. But your deliveries would definitely start slowing down." A few boardmakers stopped using Clark Foam. But nobody could make blanks as efficiently, as cheaply, or with such consistently high quality as Clark. Walker Foam—Clark's last real domestic competitor, though only a fraction of his size—closed in 1973.

Clark's was an unusual monopoly, though. For all his forward-thinking industrial practice (and competitive ruthlessness), he had done more to keep board building a cottage industry than anyone. Thanks to his inexpensive blanks, garage shapers were flourishing in every beach

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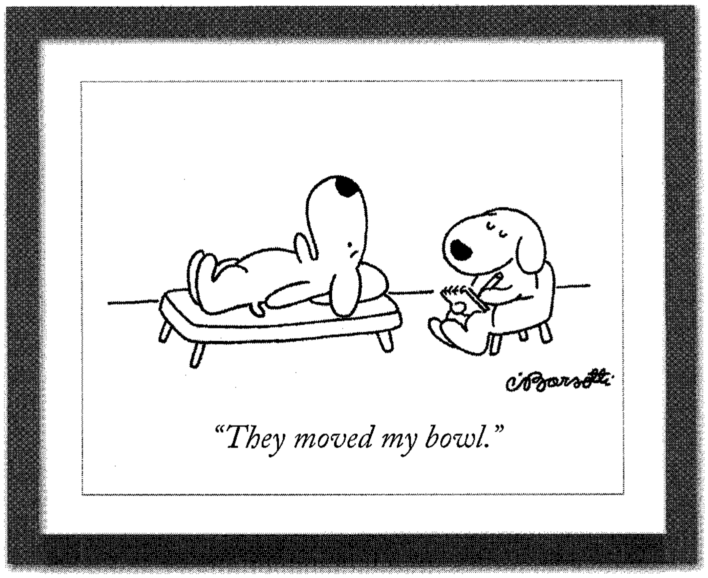

"They moved my bowl."

Charles Barsotti, 1995

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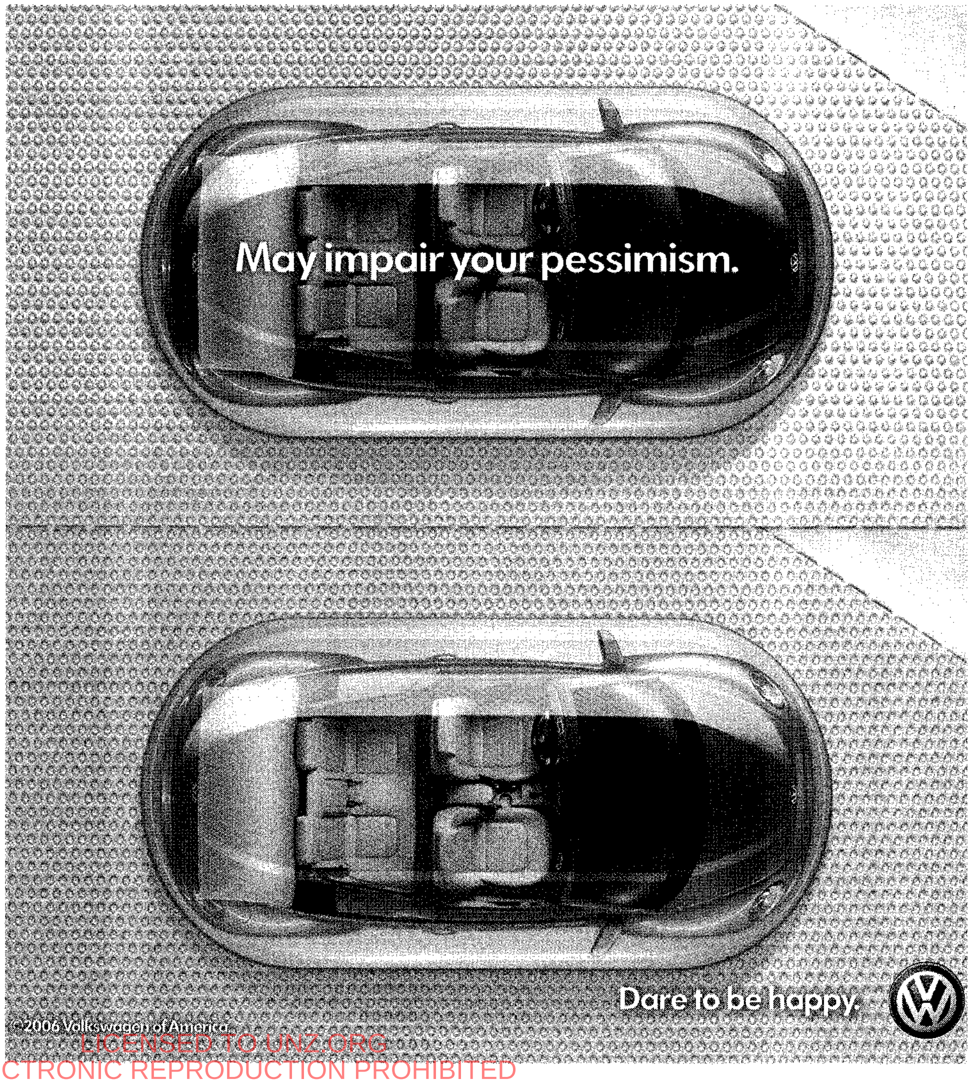


town on both coasts, in Hawaii, even in Europe, South Africa, and South America. And they were crucial to a board-design revolution that started in Australia, in 1967, and that soon reduced the average size of a surfboard from nine and a half feet long and more than twenty pounds to seven feet and less than ten pounds. (Later, it would fall toward six feet and six pounds.) Many big-name boardmakers, saddled with large inventories of longboards, got hit hard. Some of the new back-yard shapers found favor with the top riders and became the next big-name boardmakers. Clark Foam was the only established company that slid through the shortboard revolution unscathed.

Clark had always tried to give shapers blanks of whatever shape, size, density, and stringer arrangement they wanted. As board design got dramatically more subtle and varied, he began to build special concrete molds based on "plugs" that the top shapers provided him. Eventually, he was publishing a catalogue offering blanks in more than seventy shapes, at eight densities, with stringers in four different woods, along with a library of five *thousand* templates for the "rocker"—the lengthwise curve in the bottom of the board. The variations were effectively endless.

Rocker is a critical element in shortboard design. Once, in the days of redwood and balsa, boards were basically flat from nose to tail. Today, serious surfers believe that every sixteenth of an inch of rocker in a blank template matters. Clark developed what became known as the "close-tolerance blank." His foam cores were no longer big, rough approximations of a surfboard for a shaper to transform with saw, planer, and sandpaper, but something very close to a board's finished shape. A skilled shaper could turn one into a wafer-thin, high-performance wave-riding instrument, ready for the glasser, in less than an hour. And, while the price of a finished shortboard ranges from four hundred to eight hundred dollars, until last year blanks still sold for less than a hundred dollars.

Clark's plant, which by 2005 had been in the same spot in the Laguna Hills for more than forty years, worked three shifts a day, often seven days a week, and was said to ship a thousand blanks a day. That number has never been confirmed, since Clark didn't release any figures. Still, Bill Bahne told me, "as a business model, it ranks with what anyone's done in the U.S."

Peter St. Pierre and his partners have run Moonlight Glassing since 1979. Many thousands of surfboards have been shaped and glassed in the bright warehouse space they lease in an industrial zone a few miles from the coast in northern San Diego County. St. Pierre is an affable, bearded craftsman in his early sixties. In his opinion, Clark's close-tolerance blanks weren't good for the latest generation of shapers. "Grubby took a lot of the guesswork out of it for them—they could poach other people's rockers," he told me, one morning in June. "We get young guys who call themselves shapers who will bring us a board without fin markings. They just say, 'Put 'em where you want.' They don't even understand fin theory!" Fins are inserted after a board is glassed—and glassing is the basic service Moonlight provides, along with custom paint jobs—but their placement, number, shape, and size are supposed to interact dynamically with a board's design. However, St. Pierre also sees some of the best artistry around. Wandering through his shop, I noticed racks of magnificently shaped blanks, awaiting color and glassing. In a rack of boards to be patched, I saw the scribbled names of some of the world's top surfers.

Moonlight is a word-of-mouth establishment. It doesn't sponsor any surf stars, or feel the need to advertise. In that sense, although St. Pierre is well known, his business is pure garage. "I don't want to just mindlessly send out boards," he said. "I like to have interactions with the customer. I see our boards in the water, I want to know how they're riding. How's it flexing? Everything, good and bad. It's the only way to archive what really works—at the beach." He took a sip of tea. "Boards can be like a tennis ball. They can go flat after a few weeks. And they can come alive again, too." He laughed. "You know how it is."

After forty years of surfing, I suppose I do. But I still have no idea what part of a board's performance to attribute to the glass job, to foam density, to fin placement. I generally figure the main variable is my state of mind.

At that moment, a trim, dark-haired man appeared, accompanied by a boy. They were carrying newly finished boards, looking shy and pleased, and they thanked St. Pierre. "He shaped those himself," St. Pierre said. The man's board was a rudimentary shape, but his son's was a tiny, finely wrought three-fin shape known as a thruster. It looked to be of professional quality. On the bottom of the board was a graceful painting of a compass rose. I assumed that was Moonlight's work. But St. Pierre said, "He did that, too. All we did was the glass and fins."

Not many surfers shape their own boards these days—or ride boards shaped by their dads. "But the back-yard guys are the heart and soul of design innovation," St. Pierre told me. He rattled off a list of shapes and shapers, all famous in the world of surfing. "The Campbells made the Bonzer in their back yard. Stevie Lis made the Fish in his back yard. Even the shortboard came out of a back yard—it was a grassroots revolution. Surfboards have always been a homemade thing. All the businesses are just offshoots of some guy's garage."

In the early nineties, top shapers began to experiment with computerized shaping machines. They would supply a master blank of a shape that rode especially well, elaborate measurements would be taken, and these would be programmed into a foam-cutting machine, producing a virtually identical board that required very little hand finishing. This represented a large savings in labor, and, as the price of shaping machines dropped, some of the major boardmakers bought their own. Clark opposed this development, on the ground that it jeopardized the health of the handmade-surfboard industry. But machine-shaped boards were an attractive option not just for overworked shapers but for professional surfers as well. Their boards are, as a rule, the lightest, thinnest, most highly refined instruments in use—meaning, also, the most delicate. Pros ride their boards unusually hard. They take big chances, in powerful waves, and may break any number of boards in the course of a season of competition. They do not want to have to adjust to a handmade board's quirks every time they jump on a new one.

There was also a new line of pop-outs being developed by experienced surfers and shapers, who believed that polyurethane foam had reached the limit of its potential. It was time, some boardmakers

PRISONER'S RIGHT

Yoke of years that we lived in a prison
Grants no rights: we're entitled to naught.
Not to pulpits. Nor lecterns. Nor glory.
Nor power. Nor halos of saints.
Nor in memoirs to mix with fatigue
Our colorless ashen complaints,
Nor that armies of youths should now run astride life
By the path that we treaded for them.
All will go as 'twill go. There's no point
To pound out the wheel's rut in advance.
An illumined interior suffering core:
May, for everything, this be our one recompense.
It's the loftiest gem of all earthly gemstones.
And, to carry it home undefiled,
Let, of our phantom rights, then, the very least be:
Our secreted right to an equal revenge.
There's a number. So endlessly long,
Comprehensible just to Chinese and to Russians,
All those fallen, extinguished, without guilt or trace:
In that number we're nil upon nil upon nil. . . .
Our right is but one:
To be rancorless sons
Of our luckless and sad Russian land.
Let our grievances burn, rot, decay deep inside
To the outside we'll spring living shoots: only then,
Looking up, will our Russia's fatigued countryside
See the Sun it awaited so long.

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

(Translated, from the Russian, by Ignat Solzhenitsyn.)

believed, for the development of a stronger, lighter board from new materials, perhaps some form of molded plastic. Prototypes were built in California, but when these were ready to go into mass production the work was done in Thailand. For Clark, this was a double blow—post-polyurethane pop-outs that were not barges, and that were made overseas with cheap labor.

Although Clark gave no interviews, he had, for many years, sent roughly annual state-of-the-industry letters to his customers. In 2004, he devoted much of his letter to the threat of overseas, particularly Asian, manufacturers. "Their approach to production and distribution will not follow our traditions but will be based more on conventional business school theory," he wrote. The "backyard" quality of American board building would be highlighted, humiliatingly, by the innovations of low-salaried engineers. "Looking at other manufacturing industries within the United States," Clark warned, "you will note that they have disappeared one hundred per cent. That could happen to surfboard manufacturing!"

The main hope of the American industry lay with what Clark called the "sophisticated buyer." This was a surfer who, in the hard-core case, insisted on working directly with a shaper, but anyone who could pick a board to ride from a well-stocked shop rack and give a "sound technical reason for the choice" qualified. Sophisticated buyers, presumably, would continue to reject the whole notion of generic surfboards produced anonymously by non-surfers, in faraway places, like pool toys.

The downside to increasing the number of such buyers was that the surf was too crowded already. This is the bane of most surfers' lives, and the main reason so many of us travel to the ends of the earth, camping on the sides of volcanoes and in equatorial rain forests. Clark largely stopped surfing in California long ago. After he bought a place in a rural area of the Big Island, in Hawaii, in the nineteen-seventies, and was introduced to some uncrowded local breaks, he is said to have resumed.

The crowds weren't only in the water. Orange County, a sprawling place that contains Laguna Beach, has grown in population fivefold since the days when Clark and Alter began their experiments. The Clark Foam factory, when it was built, was surrounded by cow pastures, orange groves, and bean fields in the Laguna Hills. Today, it is in the middle of an upscale suburb, Laguna Niguel, population sixty-five thousand. The hills around it are laced with tile-roofed subdivisions and shopping malls. A minatory pale-glass office building dominates the nearest bluff.

This encroachment brought Clark unwanted attention, mainly from the Environmental Protection Agency, several state environmental agencies, the county fire marshals, and something called the South Coast Air Quality Management District. There were concerns about toxic fumes, fire hazards, and worker safety: the polyurethane used in surfboards contains a possible carcinogen called toluene diisocyanate, or TDI. Clark revamped his ventilation system. But he grew frustrated with the inspectors. "They don't know chemistry," he complained to Reynolds Yater, and in one of his industry letters he wrote about having "to prove to some government idiots that my system worked."

In a non-union, cottage industry where glassers and shapers often work shirtless and in shorts, amid clouds of poisonous dust and fumes, Clark eventually had his employees who worked with foam wearing elaborate air-supply apparatuses, and regularly tested for chemical exposure. Still, he got hit with at least four workers'-compensation claims. (One of these cases, turning on exposure to TDI, was also filed as a wrongful-death suit in late July.) Clark's insurance went up, and so did his sense that he was being persecuted.

In 1993, Clark bought a large working ranch in central Oregon, and he began to spend more time there than he did in California. But he talked almost daily to his managers at the plant, and continued to micromanage his company's strategic planning. And his business touch wasn't getting any lighter. His old partner, Hobie Alter, had begun designing sailboats in the sixties—his Hobie Cat eventually became one of the world's most popular catamarans. Alter's board business was now a longboard specialty house. (Longboards, which are easier to ride, both for beginners and for aging surfers, had made a comeback, of sorts, beginning in the eighties.) His sons ran the surf business, using Clark blanks. Then Clark heard that they were trying to get some soft-top boards made in China. (Soft-tops are a new niche item, for beginners; they don't use polyurethane.) Clark apparently started giving them a hard time. Hobie heard about it, and they spoke. There were angry words, and they have had little contact since. "Gordon's always been very opinionated," Alter told me tightly. "And his opinions always work to his advantage."

As Clark passed seventy, the question of succession was raised occasionally. He had two children from his first marriage, but neither had shown an interest in the business. He had a stepdaughter from his second marriage, and she worked at Clark Foam for a while, then left. Clark seemed in no hurry to retire, anyway. His 2004 industry letter was widely considered one of his sharpest. It contained a lecture on tariffs and a disquisition on brand value that used, as an example, a prostitute who claims she's from Paris, and the prices she can charge, compared with a prostitute who says she's from Calcutta—vintage Grubby.

Then, in the summer of 2005, Clark took a trip to China. When he returned, he spoke to Luis Barajas, his wood-mill foreman. "He said, 'Luis, they got us. They build an Orange County every couple of days,'" Barajas told me.

Not long afterward, according to friends, Clark was in Hawaii, dirt-biking with Jimmy Pflueger, who is something of a local magnate, on Kauai. During a break, Pflueger told Clark a story. He had got into trouble with the state and the E.P.A. over some grading he'd done without a permit. There had been a rainstorm and a mudslide, and a lot of dirt had ended up on a coral reef. The state fined him four million dollars. The worst part, though, Pflueger said, was the way the government calculated some fines, compounding sums daily by a formula that, given time, could break the Federal Reserve.

Clark flew back to California. He brooded all weekend, according to a friend. On Monday morning, December 5th, he went into Clark Foam and approached the first worker he saw pouring foam into a mold. "That's it," he said. "That's the last foam we pour."

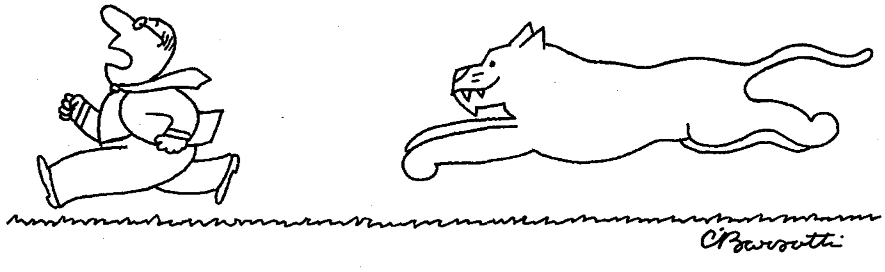
In the immediate aftermath of Blank Monday, the price of a blank doubled—if you could find one at all—and the prices of boards went up as much as two hundred dollars. Foreign blank manufacturers diverted shipping containers to California, Hawaii, and Florida, where shortages were most acute. Harold Walker, of Walker Foam, who had reopened, in a modest way, during the nineties to service the longboard revival, began ramping up production. There was a general scramble to hire Clark's ex-employees. And, within six months, there were two dozen new companies making, or preparing to make, polyurethane blanks for the American market, including four new factories in Mexico.

"There's good foam out there, but you've got to shuck and jive to get it. Nobody's up and running with a real program now," Tim Bessell, a veteran shaper, told me. I visited Bessell at his shop in La Jolla in June. He had a grab bag of blanks stacked outside his shaping bay. "These are from Brazil, England, Australia, South Africa, California," he said, pulling out blanks from the rack, grimacing. Bessell, who has been shaping for thirty years, had his worst quarterly loss in fifteen years during the first three months of 2006, and his second quarter was just as bad. "My gripe isn't Grubby quitting, but how he did it," he said. "This was a rash old man who decided, 'I'm taking my toys out of the sandbox, and fuck all you guys.' All he needed to do to be a hero was give three months' notice."

Alongside his traditional polyurethane-foam-core boards, Bessell had a number of alternative designs for sale. There were boards with cores of expanded polystyrene (EPS, the stuff of coffee cups), which has recently been refined to make it more shaper-friendly, and which does not have the TDI problem. There was a board with a core of extruded polystyrene, a material that Bessell praised. There were no examples of the most commercially successful pop-outs—the California-designed, Asian-made molded boards from a company called Surftech—but there was a remarkable-looking hollow board. It was black, and astonishingly light, with a carbon-fibre weave under an epoxy-resin skin. It even had a plug for draining any water that managed to get inside. At eleven hundred and fifty dollars, it was roughly twice what a regular shortboard costs. Some shapers believe that, in the long run, the forced innovation Clark brought about will be good. Even Bessell is excited about the possibilities. The big question, though, is whether the independent hand-shaper will be able to survive, economically, without the extraordinary support that Clark Foam provided. Everyone, including Bessell, says, "There will never be another Clark Foam."

Clark did end up selling most of his wood mill, where the stringers were made, along with his library of rocker templates. Green Valley Mill, in Oceanside, bought both, and hired Luis Barajas and his crew.

When I visited Green Valley, I got to see the great rocker library—thousands of long, curved, color-coded strips of wood, covered with runic markings—as well as the special basswood from Wisconsin that



"And the beauty and wisdom of the Western canon—that doesn't impress you?"

Clark found after a lengthy search. The basswood's unusual grain makes it extra strong when cut into a banana shape for a stringer, and it became known as Clark Select. But the glue presses at the mill, compared with the ones Clark destroyed, were primitive—a bunch of hand clamps on blanks that were anchored with rusty, concrete-filled car-wheel rims. No one has figured out how to rebuild the lost machines.

At Green Valley, I met Bill Bahne, the surf-industry veteran. He is a principal in one of the new blank-production companies, which owns Green Valley Mill. Some of his blanks were there, waiting to be glued up with stringers. They were made of a new, TDI-free polyurethane, but they had consistency problems. Bahne studied them dubiously. "It's a lot of trial and error," he said. I had seen his catalogue; it offered three plugs, and, like every new blank catalogue I'd seen, it described its meagre offerings in terms of the Clark plug that each model was meant to replace. When Clark said he was the standard, he wasn't wrong. In some ways, despite the futuristic talk now filling surf magazines—about greener, stronger new materials and technologies—board building has taken an evolutionary step backward.

I got a glimpse of the post-Clark Foam world in May, when I went to Indonesia in search of uncrowded waves. Half a dozen of us had booked a boat, with a home port in West Java, to sail to an uninhabited island farther west. Much of the discussion before we left concerned what boards to bring.

Peter was bringing a Surftech, which shocked me. He's a serious, skilled surfer, with plenty of boards, and here he was relying on a weird molded-plastic contraption that he hadn't even test-ridden. The thing was indestructible, he said, and he liked the challenge of learning to ride it. Kevin brought a couple of boards, including a brand-new thruster with an EPS foam core. That was going to be his experimental ride.

I settled on an odd pair: the first board Owl Chapman shaped for me, ten years ago, and a nearly identical one that he had made more recently. Chapman, who was a top big-wave rider in his youth, was working, last time I saw him, in a ramshackle shed in the jungle on the north shore of Oahu, living pretty much board to board. (I tried to reach him to get his views on the Clark Foam shutdown, but he has no phone.) I had been trying to get someone to reproduce the first board, which I adored, since shortly after I got it; Chapman himself had failed when I asked him to try. I heard about a kid on Long Island with a reputation for being able to replicate any board, and he made a valiant effort. The board he shaped rode well, but it was more conventional than my great Owl board, and it didn't drive through waves with the same authority. And it snapped within weeks, in Fiji.

That first Owl had been retired for years—it had so many dents and patched dings that it looked like a piece of tropical flotsam. But I happened to get it down and ride it earlier this year, on a whim, and was stunned to find that it had as much life in it as ever. St. Pierre was right: resurrection sometimes occurs.

Once we reached the island, Kevin's new board broke almost immediately—snapped in two by a relatively small wave. We couldn't decide if the EPS core was at fault; maybe the glasser had been unfamiliar with epoxy resin, and had just made the shell too light.

Peter seemed mystified by his Surftech's performance. His surfing is usually flowing and powerful; now he was throwing his board around in small, weak arcs. He fiddled with his stance, his fin arrangement. Finally, he borrowed a saw from the boat's skipper and cut a big piece off his middle fin. That seemed to improve matters, but he still wasn't himself. I blamed the Surftech.

I want to see independent shapers survive, but I don't see how anyone can stop Costco from selling Chinese-made knockoff boards at half the price of American originals. Parents buying first boards for their kids will shop there. Experienced surfers—the "sophisticated buyers"—are looking for something else, and somebody will figure out how to make it. In the meantime, if surfboards generally get more expensive and less satisfying to ride, the crowd problem may even ease. Not that I've seen anything to suggest that yet. In the bay off the uninhabited island west of Java where we went in May, three other boats full of surfers—from Europe, Australia, and New Zealand—also showed up and anchored, looking for waves. ◆

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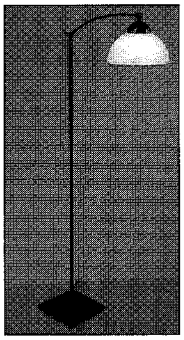

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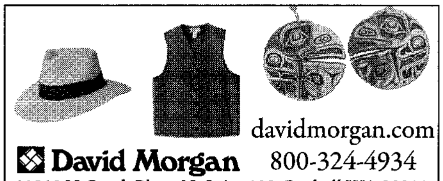

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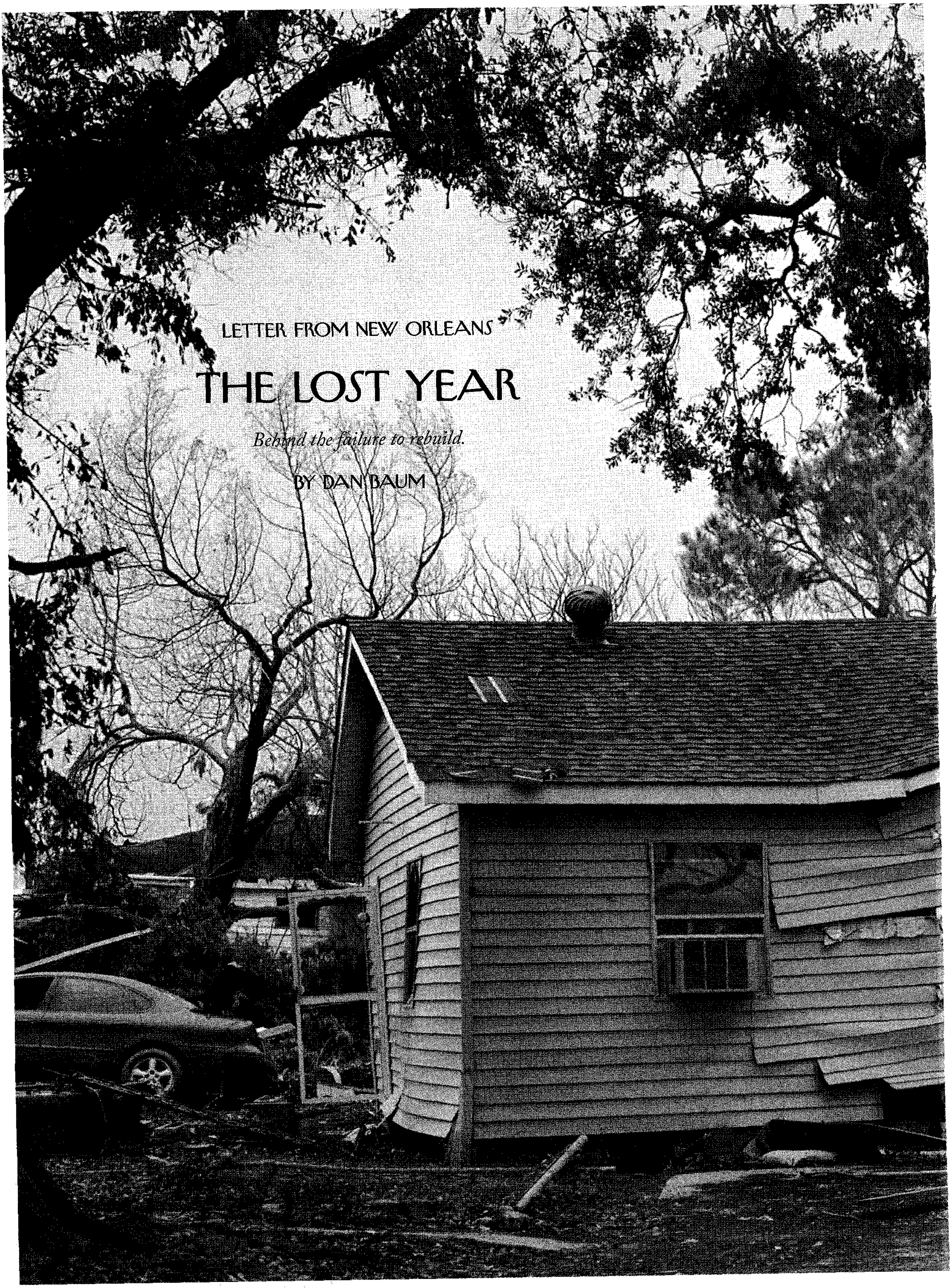
LETTER FROM NEW ORLEANS

THE LOST YEAR

Behind the failure to rebuild.

BY DAN BAUM



The downriver side of New Orleans has always evoked strong emotions. The French avoided it, settling the high ground of a Mississippi River oxbow that would become the heart of the city. The Americans, who took over in 1803, reviled it as a pestilential swamp. "A land hung in mourning," the novelist George Washington Cable later wrote. "Darkened by gigantic cypresses, submerged; a land of reptiles, silence, shadow, decay." Free blacks and European immigrants too poor to crowd into the upriver districts felled the cypresses to build clever, elongated houses that ventilated well, and assembled a rural neighborhood that was pencilled onto city maps as the Ninth Ward. Without much in the way of schools, hospitals, or transportation, the people of the Ninth Ward depended on each other, organizing mutual-aid and benevolent societies to care for the sick and the indigent. At the turn of the century, when New Orleans's civic leaders began developing plans for a so-called Industrial Canal, connecting Lake Pontchartrain with the river, they routed it through the Ninth, cutting off the area that came to be known as the Lower Ninth Ward. Three bridges eventually joined the Lower Nine, as it is called, to the city, but the district remained isolated.

Only fourteen thousand people lived in the Lower Ninth Ward at the time of Katrina—fewer than three per cent of the city's population—but the neighborhood instantly assumed an importance out of all proportion to its size. Depending on who was talking, the two sodden square miles represented either the indolence, poverty, and crime that Katrina had given the city a chance to expunge or the irreplaceable taproot of African-American New Orleans. The Lower Ninth Ward became, in the aftermath of Katrina, a vortex of overwrought emotion and intemperate rhetoric, a stand-in for conflicting visions of the city's future.

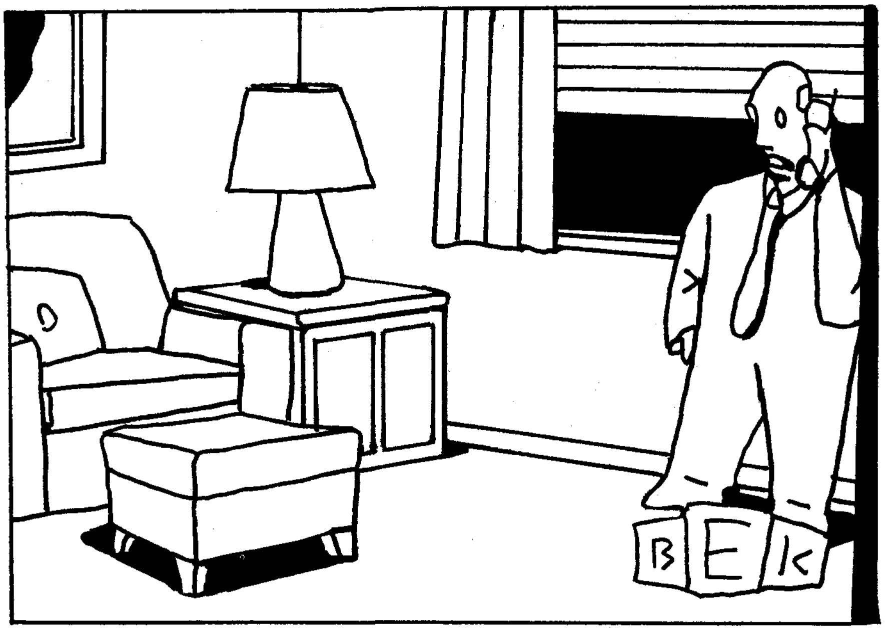
New Orleans had a tradition of intermarriage going back to the French period, and the blacks living upriver of the canal tended to be light-skinned. The Lower Nine came to be known simultaneously as the dark-skinned side of town and as an area that was exceptionally integrated. Cane cutters from surrounding sugar plantations poured into the city after the First World War, in search of good dockside jobs, and the housing lots in the Lower Nine were cheap enough for them to buy yet big enough to keep gardens, chickens, even hogs. Schools, of course, were segregated, but Frank Minyard, who has been the Orleans Parish coroner for more than thirty years, grew up in the Lower Nine in a white family so loyal to the neighborhood that his mother forbade him to swim in the Audubon Park pool, in the city's tony Audubon Park section. "My mother used to say, 'They don't like us poor whites uptown,'" he told me. "I didn't get to swim in the pool until I was out of the Navy."

The neighborhood's racial weave began to unravel on November 14, 1960, after Brown v. Board of Education, when federal marshals escorted a six-year-old black child named Ruby Bridges through a jeering crowd and into the William Frantz Public School, on North Galvez Street. Leander Perez, the political boss of adjoining St. Bernard Parish, which was almost entirely white, urged white New Orleanians to resist. "Don't wait until the burr-heads are forced into your schools," he said. "Do something about it now!" Whites gradually fled New Orleans. By the time Hurricane Katrina struck, the city had lost about a quarter of its people, and more than sixty-five per cent of those who remained were black; in the Lower Nine, the figure was more than ninety-eight per cent. A quarter of New Orleanians were poor, double the national average; in the Lower Nine, most households were getting by on less than thirty thousand dollars a year (the national average is fifty-seven thousand), much of it from public assistance. For years, the city has been one of the most violent in America. Ruby Bridges's brother was killed in 1990 at the housing project where he lived; last July, her oldest son, Craig, was shot dead on a New Orleans street while on a brief break from his job on a cruise ship. The Lower Nine was particularly dangerous. By the eve of Katrina, it had become, in the words of a local criminologist, "the murder capital of the murder capital."

The Lower Ninth Ward does not lie particularly low. Large portions of New Orleans—including some wealthy areas near Lake Pontchartrain—sit four or more feet below sea level, while almost all the Lower Nine sits within a foot and a half of sea level, and parts of it are a couple of feet above. What doomed it during Katrina was its position near the junction of the Industrial Canal and another canal, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, or Mr. Go, which extends eastward from the city. The two waterways funnelled Katrina's surge into a wedge that burst the Industrial Canal's levee with a sound like cannon fire early on the morning of August 29th. The violence was tremendous. A huge wave scraped half a square mile of houses off their foundations and ground them to rubble. A red iron barge the size of an airplane hangar rode through the breach and landed on top of a school bus. Not a house in the Lower Nine was spared; most of those which didn't collapse or slide off their foundations flooded to their rooflines. Their residents—among the least able to evacuate, for want of cars and money—drowned in the oily brown floodwaters or hacked holes through attic ceilings and sat on scalding tar-paper roofs for days, waiting to be rescued. The most famous, Fats Domino, was carried from the roof of his house—an incongruously grand white mansion in a particularly bleak part of the Lower Nine—by Coast Guard helicopter in the middle of the night.

Televised images of desperate people wading out of the Lower Nine shocked the American people—the obesity and missing teeth, the raggedness and strange English. Commentators of all persuasions were astonished and outraged that these citizens' plight had been ignored by the government and the national media for decades. "A Third World country had suddenly appeared on the Gulf Coast," a *Times* article said. Shepard Smith, on Fox News,

A house on Tennessee Street in the Lower Ninth Ward; January, 2006. Photographs by Robert Polidori.



"I have a bad association with people."

declared that the country would be "forever scarred by Third World horrors unthinkable in this nation until now."

Even as the city remained underwater, prominent politicians and businessmen began speaking of Katrina as a quick fix for generations of mistakes and neglect, a deus ex machina that would finally eliminate poverty in New Orleans. Some of the best-publicized early rhetoric seemed to confuse eliminating poverty with eliminating the poor. Twelve days after the storm, the *Wall Street Journal's* Washington Wire column generated a furor when it reported that Richard Baker, a Republican congressman from Baton Rouge, had been overheard telling lobbyists, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did." (Baker claimed that he had been misquoted.) A former maker of shipboard electronics and a wealthy private investor named James Reiss told the *Journal* that, in rebuilding, he wanted to see the city transformed "demographically." A number of people I encountered—often barricaded in their homes and heavily armed—explained the distinction between the "good blacks" they'd welcome back and other blacks, or passed along a bit of back-fence etymology, saying that the root of the word "Katrina" is "cleansing."

From the earliest days of the crisis, the Lower Ninth Ward seemed to be in a special category. No other neighborhood, for example, was cordoned off by troops. When outside help arrived in force, six days after the storm, the National Guard roadblocked the bridges leading into the Lower Nine. Of all those people who were toughing it out in attics across the flooded city, only those of the Lower Nine were forbidden to return if they waded out for supplies. Though eighty per cent of New Orleans was inundated, the city's homeland-security director, Terry Ebbert, appeared to single out the Lower Nine when he told a reporter that "nothing out there can be saved at all," and Mayor Clarence Ray Nagin, Jr., said, inaccurately, "I don't think it can ever be what it was, because it's the lowest-lying area." Ebbert and Nagin were exhausted, stunned by the vastness of the destruction, and lacking solid information. But nobody seriously proposed ditching Lakeview, an upscale white neighborhood that had borne the force of another breach, that of the Seventeenth Street Canal, and lay under even deeper water. Some bluntly welcomed an opportunity to abandon the Lower Ninth Ward. "I don't want those people from the Lower Ninth Ward back," Robby Robinson, the owner of French Quarter Candles, said. "I don't think any businessperson does. They didn't contribute anything to this city."

Because of its history of black homeownership, the Lower Ninth Ward is a neighborhood of deep roots. Many black New Orleanians either have lived there at some point or grew up visiting relatives there. Suggestions that it be forsaken sounded to many like a pretext for getting rid of the city's black majority. Three days after the levees ruptured, I met a man named Michael Johnson on an uptown street that was covered with smashed oak boughs. He and a friend, David Bell, and Bell's two small daughters had just escaped from the Lower Nine by lashing three refrigerators into a makeshift raft. "We put the babies in. David and I got in the water and pushed," Johnson said. He is short and sturdy; in his muddy, tattered clothes, he looked like an escaped convict. (He is actually a dialysis technician.) He and I found some plastic buckets and took them to the banks of the Mississippi, a few blocks away, so the family could bathe. His voice cracked as he described their ordeal, which included a terrifying night on the hot tarmac of an Interstate 10 overpass with hundreds of restless and angry refugees. Johnson had food and drinking water for only a couple of days, and no means of leaving the city, but his mind was already leaping to the bigger picture. "I'm not saying they planned this as a way to empty New Orleans of poor black people," he said as he dipped buckets of khaki-colored water from the river. "But it's sure going to work out that way." Already, the city seemed to be cleaving along a black-white line.

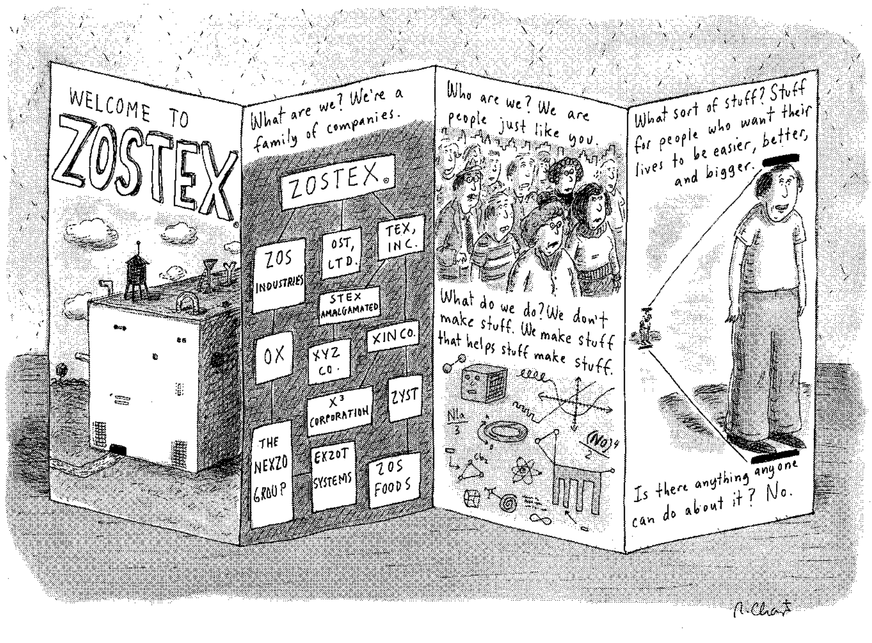
When President Bush addressed the nation from Jackson Square on the evening of September 15th, the French Quarter was dark and silent. Crews from the White House had set up generators and lit the gleaming-white façade of St. Louis Cathedral as a backdrop. In his speech, which lasted twenty-six minutes, the President eloquently praised the victims' "core of strength that survives all hurt, a faith in God no storm can take away, and a powerful American determination to clear the ruins." Then he vowed, "We will do what it takes, we will stay as long as it takes, to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives." He announced that more than sixty billion dollars would be spent on "the first stages of the relief effort." He also pointed out that, "in the work of rebuilding, as many jobs as possible should go to the men and women who live in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama."

Mayor Nagin initially believed that Bush's promise would amount to a hundred billion dollars, spread over ten years—enough not only to recover from Katrina but also to cure many of the old city's pathologies. Nagin spent his early childhood in Treme ("Tre-*may*"), the heart of Creole New Orleans. His father worked three menial jobs, and his mother tended a lunch counter in a K mart. He was the second in his family to go to college—a historically black college, the Tuskegee Institute, in Alabama—but his rise to prominence, unlike that of most Southern black politicians, was through the corporate world rather than the pulpit. By the time he was forty-six, Nagin was earning four hundred thousand dollars a year managing Cox Communications' cable-television operation in New Orleans. His mayoral campaign in 2002 was predicated on "running the city like a business," and his victory is usually credited to white voters. His first three years in office were remarkably scandal-free for New Orleans, but his relationship with the black majority has always been strained; the preacher of the city's biggest black congregation has called him a "white man in black skin."

Bush's pledge was contingent on the city's having a recovery plan, so Nagin announced, on September 30th, that he was forming the Bring New Orleans Back Commission to develop one. As he explained to me later, what seemed most important at the time was maintaining good relations with the White House, and he appointed several people who, if necessary, could get President Bush on the phone. The co-chairs were Mel Lagarde, a white health-care executive, and Barbara Major, a black community activist and the director of St. Thomas Health Services, a clinic. In some circles, the group came to be known as the Canizaro Commission, because its most influential member was a real-estate developer named Joseph Canizaro, a friend of Bush's and one of his biggest fund-raisers. Although Nagin was careful to appoint eight blacks, eight whites, and one Hispanic, Barbara Major, the only figure on the commission who is from what poor blacks call "the community," told the *Times*, "Some people don't understand that an equal number of black and white isn't the same as equity."

By early October, most of the people gutting houses and clearing fallen trees from New Orleans's streets weren't locals but Hispanics from elsewhere. Some fifteen thousand Hispanics had lived in New Orleans before Katrina, but they'd never had a high profile—no Spanish radio station, identifiable Hispanic neighborhood, or fashionable cuisine. (The restaurant Nacho Mama's, in the Garden District, was owned by a man named Shane Finkelstein.) Eduardo Ramirez, a twenty-five-year-old construction worker from Mexico City who was standing in line one afternoon for a cup of stew at a Salvation Army wagon, told me that, before the storm, hanging Sheetrock paid twelve dollars an hour. "It pays twenty now," he said. "And the cops don't bother us anymore, asking for papers." Ramirez and several friends commuted two hours each way from Baton Rouge. Other Mexicans he knew were sleeping in tents. On October 4th, representatives from a number of organizations, including the A.F.L.-C.I.O. and the N.A.A.C.P., held a joint press conference to denounce the business owners who were hiring non-union workers from out of state, even when locals were available and ready to work. The electricians' union said that one contractor had dismissed its union employees "in favor of workers from Texas."

On October 6th, Mayor Nagin held a "Back to Business" meeting in the downtown Sheraton hotel, and in the opening words of a twenty-minute speech managed to alienate almost everybody. Several hundred rumpled, frightened, grief-stricken business owners had crowded into the Armstrong Ballroom to hear the Mayor and other officials talk about reviving New Orleans's economy. Nagin, who walks with the stylish lope of a jazz singer, appeared confident as he took the microphone. "I know you want to know how do I make sure that New Orleans is not overrun by Mexican workers?" he said, without preamble, in his easygoing homeboy drawl. He was addressing television cameras at the back of the room, and, by extension, his increasingly resentful black constituents scattered around the South. But the business owners, far from being concerned about Mexicans, were grateful for the pliant and low-cost workforce digging them out of the muck. Judging by the response on a twenty-four-hour call-in radio show that was the only broadcast airing in New Orleans, blacks, too, found Nagin's baldly racial comments


WELCOME TO ZOSTEX
What are we? We're a family of companies.
ZOSTEX
ZOS INDUSTRIES
OST, LTD.
TEX, INC.
STEX AMALGAMATED
OX
XYZ CO.
XIN CO.
X³ CORPORATION
ZYST
THE NEXZO GROUP
EXZOT SYSTEMS
ZOS FOODS
Who are we? We are people just like you.
What do we do? We don't make stuff. We make stuff that helps stuff make stuff.
What sort of stuff? Stuff for people who want their lives to be easier, better, and bigger.
Is there anything anyone can do about it? No.
R. Chast

on their behalf insulting. The Mayor backpedalled for days.

Over breakfast one morning, the city's best-known pollster, Silas Lee—a large bald man of fifty-one with an air of perpetual amusement—analyzed Nagin's mistakes, starting with appointing the Canizaro Commission before reaching out to the people of New Orleans. The Mayor, Lee said, needed to "disperse teams right away, and organize discussion panels at places in the community." He should have advertised a 1-800 number in the Houston *Chronicle*, for instance, encouraging evacuees to call in. Taking measures like these would send the message that ordinary New Orleanians—and not just a small group of élites—were included in the planning. "In a volatile time, you have one chance to get your message out," Lee said. "You hit the bull's-eye or that's it." Lee makes a lot of his money coaching experts on how to testify in court—how to convey complicated information to jurors, frequently of limited education, without patronizing them. Nagin's commission would need that skill, he said. Painful decisions about what to keep and what to change would be based on such arcana as floodplains, actuarial tables, population density, and city budgets. The "jury"—the population of New Orleans, mostly black and poorly educated, affected by generations of poverty and discrimination, traumatized by the storm, and scattered all over the country—would be hard to win over. Discussions involving the Lower Nine would be especially sensitive. The area, Lee said, "represents African-Americans' cultural and historical significance, and their financial stability. They're not going to let anybody take that away."

Nagin stumbled immediately when it came to the Lower Ninth Ward. He began allowing residents to "look and leave" on October 12th, so they could spend a few daylight hours plucking possessions from the wreckage. Some travelled great distances from their temporary shelters. To get into the neighborhood, they tried to cross one of the bridges over the Industrial Canal or to circle around to the east and enter through St. Bernard Parish, where the Lower Nine's border was fortified by a wall of flood-wrecked cars stacked three high. National Guard troops protected all the approaches, and, for reasons that varied from soldier to soldier, they refused to let many people in. The residents were furious, and their frustration nourished a whole new crop of conspiracy theories: the city wanted to turn the Lower Nine into an industrial park; developers wanted the Lower Nine, with its riverfront and view of downtown, for condominiums; somebody's cousin's cousin saw Donald Trump drive through in a limousine. The rumors became so widespread that Nagin felt compelled, the following week, to issue a statement: "Read my lips: We will rebuild the Lower Ninth Ward."

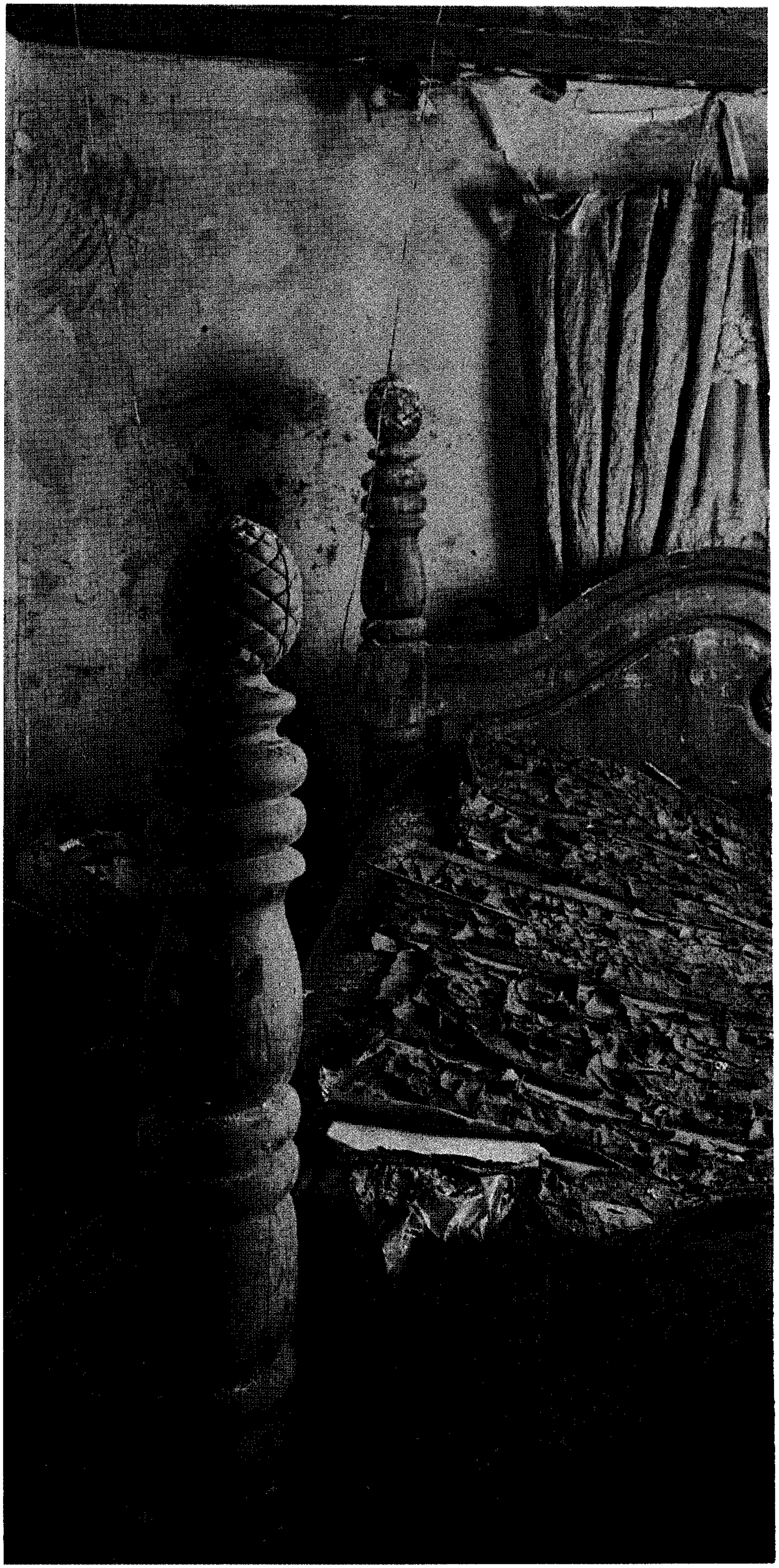
Seven weeks after the storm, Richard Baker—the Louisiana congressman who had reportedly celebrated God's "cleanup" of public housing—introduced a bill to finance reconstruction throughout the state. In local mythology, the proposal quickly became known as an eighty-billion-dollar buyout, even though the bill stated that federal spending would be capped at less than half that amount. Under the bill, the government would buy, at sixty per cent of the pre-Katrina value, any flood-damaged house or small business in Louisiana that an owner wanted to sell. The government would consolidate the properties and sell them for planned development. Baker's proposal was big enough to save New Orleans. It would put money and options in the hands of homeowners. And it was tailored to appeal to Bush's sensibilities—government involvement would be temporary, and about half of the initial public outlay would be recovered when redeveloped properties were sold. The bill made New Orleans the greatest urban-revival opportunity in recent American history, and planners and architects from around the world gathered to help.

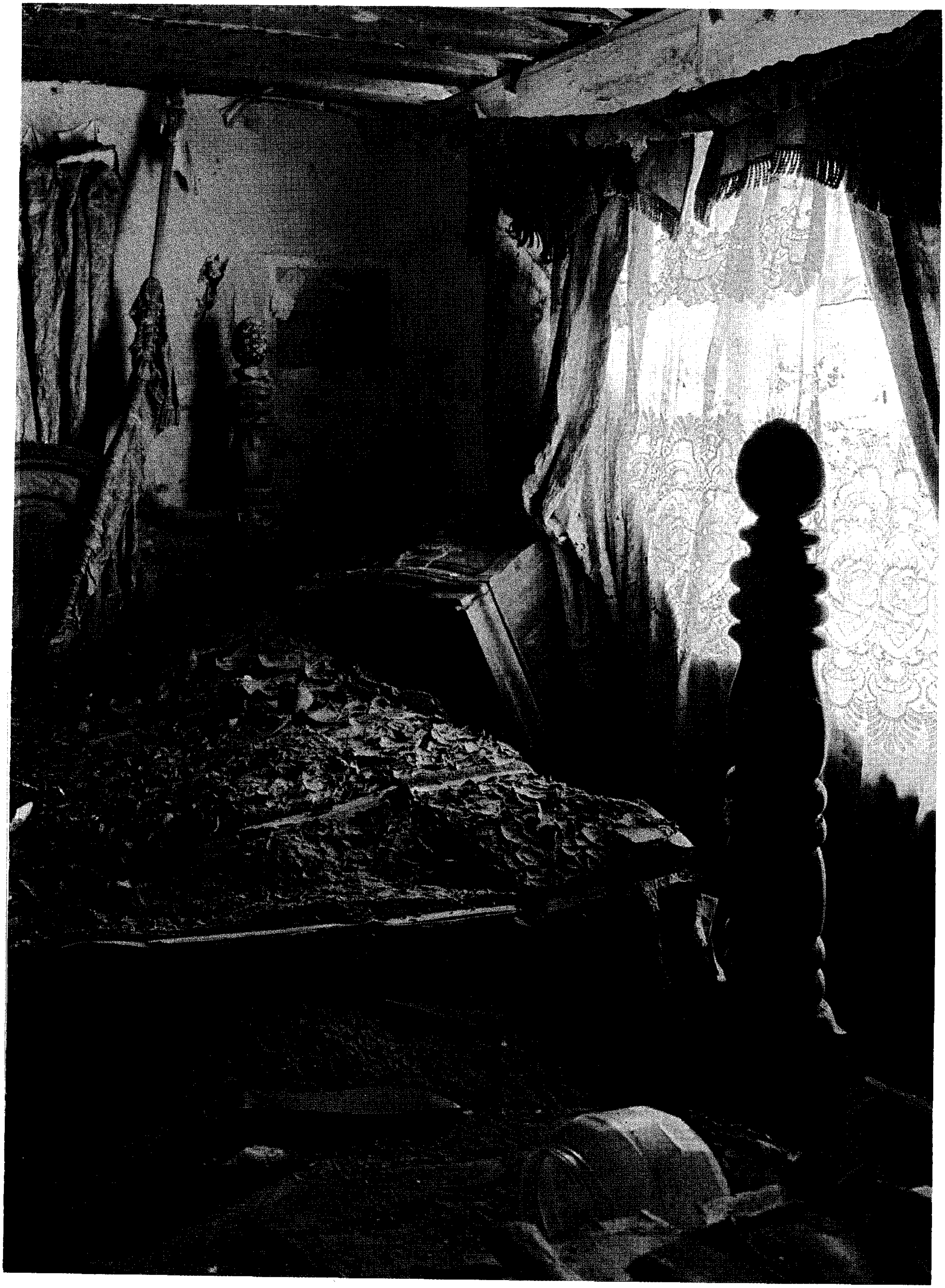
More than just New Orleans was at stake. A third of the world's population lives in coastal zones, many of them in delta cities that may flood as the climate changes and seas rise. The Netherlands' complex of levees, fortified after a hurricane killed hundreds in 1953, is a respected flood-control model; done right, planners said, New Orleans could serve as another example of how to rebuild, smarter and better, a city flooded on an unprecedented scale. "That is the silver lining in this whole disaster," a prominent local architect named Ray Manning told the *Times-Picayune*. "We have this incredible, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reëngage and recalibrate this city in a way that, politically, you might never have been able to get to." Joseph Canizaro called the city a "clean sheet."

In their enthusiasm to create a new city, though, the planners were up against New Orleanians' uncommon fondness for the old one. A Gallup poll conducted a few weeks before Katrina found that more than half of the city's residents, regardless of age, race, or wealth, were "extremely satisfied" with their personal lives—a higher percentage than in any of the twenty-one major American cities in the survey. I had glimpsed that stubborn affection in October, when the first secondline since Katrina wound its way through the debris-strewn streets of Treme. The secondline is the quintessential traffic-disrupting New Orleans art form; in this case, the Black Men of Labor, a social aid and pleasure club, marched in matching yellow print shirts, with matching hat bands and parasols, while the Hot 8 Brass Band followed behind them, blasting music into the mostly vacant neighborhood. As the procession moved along St. Bernard and Dorgenois Streets, people materialized from the shadows. They ran laughing down the steps of houses blessedly elevated, or emerged gloved and masked, carrying buckets, from the gloom of moldy interiors. More than a hundred people fell in with the band, shimmying their shoulders and twitching their hips—tentatively at first, as though remembering how to celebrate, and then bursting into full-on, high-stepping, arm-waving street jive. Fred Johnson, a non-profit housing consultant who was shading himself with a yellow-and-green parasol, nodded appreciatively and remarked, "You can't plan this in, you can't plan this out. You can't legislate this in, you can't legislate this out."

Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco created a commission of her own. The Louisiana Recovery Authority was established with twenty-three members, who were to advise her on rebuilding and later to oversee the distribution of the federal dollars that were expected to begin flowing any day. The only person named to both Nagin's commission and Blanco's was Donald (Boysie) Bollinger, who personified the impatience for a "new" New Orleans which was the driving ethic of both the city and the state commissions. Bollinger is broad-chested and jowly, with a big mane of gray hair, bushy expressive eyebrows, and the carriage of a viceroy. A Cajun from Lockport, about thirty miles west of New Orleans, he owns seven shipyards in and around the city, where, before the storm, he employed about a thousand people. He has been a friend of George W. Bush for a quarter century. Bollinger invited me one day to follow his silver Mercedes to a shipyard on the other side of the Mississippi. As we crossed over the sweeping white Crescent City Connection bridge, the creepy stillness of New Orleans receded, and it was striking to see the bustling activity at Bollinger's Destrehan Avenue shipyard. Every berth was occupied by a storm-damaged ferry or barge. Great geysers of welding sparks rained down upon the docks, and the racket was intense. All that was holding things up, Bollinger said, was a shortage of manpower. "Ever since the storm, I've been trying to get my workforce back," he shouted over the din. "My H.R. people went to every shelter in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi, offering jobs at twelve to eighteen dollars an hour. I didn't get one worker." Bollinger held the view that the Federal Emergency Management Agency was pampering evacuees, by handing families two thousand dollars in emergency help. "I said to the President, 'You're empowering people not to come back to work.' The President said, 'I don't think two thousand dollars will do that.' I said, 'Mr. President, these people haven't had two thousand dollars in their lives.'" Rather than wait, Bollinger was hiring as many Mexicans as he could find. "I'm hoping the people of New Orleans come back and take a different attitude toward employment," he said, pulling open the door to a small office building. "But until they do . . ."

We entered what had once been a reception area but was now a "kitchen"—



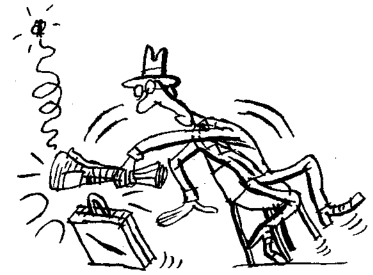


a row of brand-new microwave ovens and some folding tables and chairs. Down a hall, small panelled offices had been converted to dormitories; four double bunk beds filled each one, their mattresses wrapped in plastic. Bollinger has devoted decades to improving New Orleans incrementally, as a chairman of the National World War II Museum and the president of the New Orleans Region of the Boy Scouts of America, and as a member of various committees to improve transportation, housing, and public schools—which he called "a failure." Now he was a believer in Katrina-as-opportunity. "One storm, we have a whole new playing field," he said as we examined a row of narrow fibreglass shower stalls.

Bollinger believed that Nagin's commission should deal with the city's blighted neighborhoods by engineering them off the map. "We do ourselves a disservice if we end with the concentrated poverty as it was," he said. He supported a radical plan that the commissioners were discussing, which would sprinkle the poor throughout the middle class, in the hope that, among other things, they would absorb a work ethic. "If both my neighbors get up and go to work, *I'm* more likely to get up and go to work," Bollinger said.

The chief promoter of mixed-income neighborhoods in New Orleans is Pres Kabacoff, whose company, HRI Associates, specializes in transforming disused industrial areas into trendy residential neighborhoods. Kabacoff, a handsome and soft-spoken man of sixty, has for years been pushing Operation Rebirth, a four-billion-dollar mega-plan that would, among other things, convert one of the city's oldest housing projects, just outside the French Quarter, to a mixed-income development. Operation Rebirth would scramble the poor and the middle class in new housing throughout Treme and the lower Garden District, and provide the city with a light-rail system. Kabacoff described the project, which would be funded by the Baker bill, as New Orleans's best shot at greatness. His office, on the thirty-first floor of a building in the Central Business District, has a vast window overlooking the area in question, and, as we unrolled an artist's rendering of the project, he swept a hand across the view. "New Orleans could be an Afro-Caribbean Paris," he said.

The era of social engineering by wrecking ball began in 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court allowed Washington, D.C., to raze and redevelop a section of the run-down Southwest neighborhood. Whatever good such urban-renewal projects as this may have done, they traumatized residents of the minority neighborhoods they obliterated. This was especially true when the projects incorporated interstate highways. After I-94 displaced hundreds of people in St. Paul, Minnesota, during the nineteen-sixties, one observer wrote, "Very few blacks lived in Minnesota, but the road builders found them." Black New Orleans had suffered its share of urban renewal, which carried echoes of the 1923 splitting of the Ninth Ward by the Industrial Canal. In the nineteen-sixties, city-council members chose to run Interstate 10 through the center of Treme. The city cut down the large oaks shading Claiborne Avenue—a graceful boulevard where blacks celebrated a parallel-universe Mardi Gras—and overhung it with a gigantic concrete roadway. Planners also razed eight square blocks of homes and businesses to build a cultural center and amusement park inspired by the Tivoli Gardens, in Copenhagen. The project never materialized, but urban renewal wiped out half of Treme. Likewise, though it wasn't called urban renewal anymore, the city got a federal grant in the nineteen-nineties to raze the St. Thomas housing project, which occupied a prime spot near the Mississippi River, and replace it with mixed-income housing and resident-owned shops. Pres Kabacoff eventually got the contract, and the result, River Garden, is a collection of simple, attractive attached houses that stood up well to Katrina. Somewhere along the way, though, the number of subsidized units fell by more than two thirds; the idea of resident management disappeared; and the small resident-owned stores became a two-hundred-thousand-square-foot Wal-Mart.



Even before Katrina, public-housing residents were fighting a city plan to replace more projects with mixed-income developments. Some argue that the projects, as grim as they are, are the wellspring of New Orleans's unique "bounce" style of hip-hop: the artists Juvenile, Master P, Turk, Baby Williams, and Soulja Slim all spent their childhoods in and around New Orleans public housing. In general, when New Orleanians describe what they love about the city, the first thing they mention is neither the food nor the music but the intimacy of the neighborhoods—knowing everybody on the block where you were born, and never leaving. "This is our neighborhood," Paula Taylor, a public-housing resident, told the *Gambit*, a local newspaper, in April. She added, "Do I want to see it better? Yes. Safe? Yes. Clean and decent? Yes. But this is home." It would be hard to imagine an idea less suited to New Orleans culture than breaking up the neighborhoods. When I asked Kabacoff about objections to his mixed-income plans, he waved them away. "You get it from both sides," he said. "I've also gotten e-mails saying, 'You're contributing to the niggerization of New Orleans.'"

For residents of the Lower Nine, the most frightening proposal before the Bring New Orleans Back Commission was to "shrink the footprint" of New Orleans. The idea, in many ways, made sense: the city's present size and scale were appropriate for the 1960 population of more than six hundred thousand. After the exodus following school integration, many buildings, and some whole blocks, were abandoned. Planners estimated that the post-Katrina population would reach only a quarter of a million—about half of what it was before the storm. Life among thousands of deserted buildings would be bleak, and a city shorn of much of its tax base would be hard-pressed to provide services to sparsely inhabited, far-flung settlements. In early January, the commission published a map of the proposed

WOOD

That girl I didn't love, then because she was going to leave me, loved,
that girl, that Sunday when I stopped by and she was in bed in her nightgown,
(it only came to me later that somebody else had just then been with her),

that girl, when my hand touched her stomach, under her nightgown,
began turning her stomach to wood—I hadn't known this could be done,
that girls, that humans, could do this—then, when her stomach was wood,

she began turning the rest of herself to perhaps something harder, steel,
or harder; perhaps she was turning herself, her entire, once so soft self,
to some unknown mineral substance found only on other very far planets,

planets with chemical storms and vast, cold ammonia oceans of ice,
and I just had to pretend—I wasn't taking this lightly, I wasn't a kid—
that I wasn't one of those odd, potato-shaped moons with precarious orbits,

then—it was Sunday, though I don't recall bells—I was out, in the street,
and where is she now, dear figment, dear fragment, where are you now,
in your nightgown, in your bed, steel and wood? Dear steel, dear wood.

—*C. K. Williams*

shrunken city. Huge areas indicated by round green blotches would be converted to parks and green space. All of the blotches covered areas instantaneously recognizable to New Orleanians as primarily black areas. Oliver Thomas, the lumbering, emotional president of the city council and a native of the Lower Nine, led the opposition to a geographically smaller city. "To say you're not going to fix this community or that community—you're not honoring the dead!" he told a crowded council chamber on the evening of January 6th. The room erupted in applause. Before Katrina, sixty per cent of homes in the Lower Nine were owned by the people who lived in them—a higher percentage than in the city as a whole—and Thomas was eager to help his constituents protect the one thing of which they were sure: that property rights are sacred, and that they owned a city lot.

Those who wanted a smaller footprint waited all fall and winter for the federal government to relieve them of the burden of fighting for it. FEMA was set to release, for the first time since 1984, new guidelines for maps that would show what parts of the city the federal government would insure against floods. The maps were expected to rule out certain areas and thus cut through the racial politics. Proponents talked excitedly about the "discipline" they hoped the maps would impose—the city-planning equivalent of "Wait till your father gets home!"

Sean Reilly, a member of Governor Blanco's statewide recovery authority, told me that New Orleans's obsession with neighborhoods was dangerous in the context of the bigger hurricanes predicted by atmospheric scientists. "When you say 'neighborhood,' it's become politically and racially charged," he said, the day we met in the office of his family's national billboard-advertising company, in Baton Rouge. The White House had just approved $6.2 billion for housing, and Reilly wanted the state to withhold it from any place that was too low-lying. "We should talk about blocks and elevations, not neighborhoods, so we can talk about people rebuilding out of harm's way." Reilly, a red-haired man in his forties who likes to call himself "Mr. Tough Love," showed me a poster-size satellite photograph of New Orleans at the height of the flood, color-coded according to water depth. He ran his hand over the darkest areas, which included a sliver of the Lower Nine. "We're not going to allow rebuilding where it's unsafe. We know what the FEMA maps are going to say. They will make some decisions. Certain places are obviously unsafe to build."

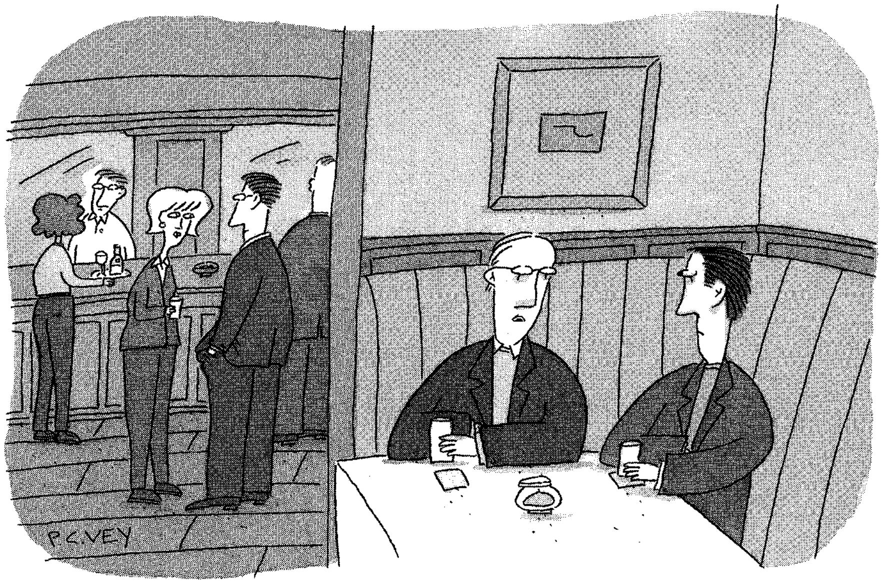
Neither Nagin's nor Blanco's commission had any real authority, except to make recommendations. But, in a city desperate for direction and leadership, the media reported every notion that the commissions discussed. Ideas poured forth in a dizzying torrent: scramble the neighborhoods; ban building in the hardest-hit areas; make the city smaller; impose a three-year moratorium on building; no, three months; no, one month; no, forget the moratorium and let neighborhoods organize themselves, but, if too few return after a year, pull the plug on services. The debates were hard to follow, especially for citizens evacuated to Houston or Atlanta. The process paralyzed those trying to make decisions about damaged homes, and exacerbated their sense of exclusion. "It's like someone coming to totally redecorate your home, and they don't talk to you. You feel raped, violated," the pollster Silas Lee said. "First, nature violated them, then the bureaucracy and planning process. If the commissions had understood that you're not just physically rebuilding but emotionally rebuilding, they'd be achieving something now instead of deadlocked."

If ever a city needed a voice of brotherhood, it was New Orleans after Katrina. No one could find the right words, including the city's powerful clergymen. When I visited the First Baptist Church on Canal Boulevard, which has about a thousand congregants, mostly white, its blue-eyed and flinty pastor, the Reverend David Crosby, told me, "There is nothing left in the Lower Ninth Ward but dirt! A woman who has a house down there, what's she got? A piece of dirt worth two or three thousand dollars." During a Sunday service at Watson Memorial Teaching Ministries, on St. Charles Avenue, the Reverend Tom Watson, a scholarly-looking African-American who subsequently challenged Nagin in this year's race for mayor, alternately scolded his congregants for their mistrust ("You have to ask yourself, am I involved in something that would be divisive in my community?") and stoked it ("I believe there is a systematic conspiracy to keep people out so they can make this city the way they want it").

The planning process so alienated the black majority that even ideas that showed promise were not acknowledged. Making the city smaller, for example, didn't have to mean annihilating the Lower Nine. Janet Howard runs a nonprofit group called the Bureau of Government Research, which issues critiques of New Orleans's waste and inefficiency. A former Wall Street lawyer with a vinegary, patrician disdain for pomposity, she often criticized the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, but she was a strong proponent of shrinking the footprint. In a borrowed downtown computer-company office that she'd been using since her own office flooded, she explained to me how the city could contract without destroying neighborhood integrity, through land swaps. She sketched it for me on a legal pad, showing how those in, say, the utterly destroyed parts of the Lower Nine who wanted to return could swap with people who owned lots in the less damaged part and didn't want to return. The result: a smaller, but intact, Lower Nine neighborhood.

On Martin Luther King's birthday, as Nagin's reëlection campaign geared up, the Mayor reached out to his black constituents. "It's time for us to rebuild a New Orleans, the one that should be a chocolate New Orleans," he said. A bit later, he added, "This city will be a majority African-American city. It's the way God wants it to be. You can't have it no other way." Quoting from an old George Clinton song was a ham-fisted attempt at reassurance from a mayor whose diction, if not his sense of audience, was usually more precise. Jack Cafferty scolded him on CNN, and conservative bloggers were in high dudgeon—"Where is the liberal outrage?" a Web site called Rhymes with Right demanded. Nor did Nagin's pandering do him much good with black constituents. "Everybody's jaw is dropping right now," the council president, Oliver Thomas, told the *Times-Picayune*. "Even if you believe some of that crazy stuff, that is not the type of image we need to present to the nation."

New Orleanians both at home and in exile seemed to take it for granted that once the President signed on to some version of the big buyout plan proposed by Representative Baker, the Bring New Orleans Back Commission would hand down solutions like beads from a Mardi Gras float. The expectation had induced a torpor. "People have been asking, 'What's going to happen to our property?,' instead of asking, 'What can we do to save our property?' " Greta Gladney, a fourth-generation Lower Nine resident, told me in New Orleans. "Instead of coming back and getting to work, they've been asking, 'When will we get permission to come back?' " Gladney, who is forty-two, short, and caramel-colored, had her first child when she was fourteen, and went on to earn bachelor's degrees in chemistry and philosophy and a master's in business administration from Baruch College, in New York. She'd long since started rebuilding her own two-story house, on Jourdan Street, tearing off sodden plaster to let the cypress lath dry. She was impatient for her neighbors to shake off their lethargy and set about rebuilding. "People will depend on the kindness of strangers," she said, echoing Blanche Dubois. "That's not good public policy, but that's what there is in poor neighborhoods."



"Those who can't do teach others not to do."

On January 24th, New Orleans suffered what Congressman Baker called a "death blow." Donald Powell, a former F.D.I.C. chief, who was overseeing Gulf Coast recovery for the White House, announced that President Bush would not support the Baker bill. The President didn't want the government in the "real-estate business," Powell said. Of the more than two hundred thousand Louisiana homes that Katrina had destroyed, the federal government would pay to rebuild only a tenth, he said: those which lacked flood insurance, were owner-occupied, and were outside established floodplains. Officials at all levels of state and local government appeared to be taken completely by surprise; on the streets of New Orleans, people were visibly stunned.

An official involved in the negotiations with the White House told me that responsibility for handling the bill within the Administration had shifted, from the coöperative Treasury Department to the office of Allan Hubbard, the President's chief economic adviser. "Hubbard just looked at it as 'We don't want to set up another bureaucracy,'" the official said. "I'm a conservative ideologue myself, but I think it's ideological." Three weeks later, Bush announced that he would ask Congress for an additional $4.2 billion for housing in New Orleans, bringing the total to a little more than ten billion dollars—far from the ten billion dollars a year over ten years that Nagin initially had expected.

The Bring New Orleans Back Commission continued meeting into March, but its grandiose plans for social engineering now seemed pointless. The failure of Bush to "do what it takes" to rebuild New Orleans was only part of it. Much of what could have been done to improve New Orleanians' lives, such as land swaps to preserve a smaller Lower Nine, wouldn't have required a lot of money. It would, however, have required trust and coöperation. But, as the weather grew warm, the vision of a planned recovery slipped away, and an every-man-for-himself ethic replaced it. People began piling rotten wallboard on their front lawns and lining up on the eighth floor of City Hall for building permits.

Ronald W. Lewis's family left the Cedar Grove sugar plantation, in Thibodaux, Louisiana, in the nineteen-forties, and ended up at 1911 Deslonde Street, a block from the eastern bank of the Industrial Canal. After Katrina, Lewis went to stay with relatives in Thibodaux, and I met him on a warm late-January day in the parking lot of an Applebee's restaurant in Metairie, a mostly white suburb west of New Orleans. His 1986 Cadillac was leaking coolant onto the pavement as he arrived, and the driver's door was badly dented; he slid across the front seat to get out on the passenger side. "Isn't this just the most beautiful day!" he said exuberantly. Lewis is broad-shouldered and very dark, with one gold incisor, a white pencil-line mustache, and tiny diamond studs in each earlobe. He's fifty-four, but he seemed much older as he walked, hunched and stiff-legged, to my rental car. "Just wear and tear," he said, from a third of a century swinging sledgehammers and wrenching pry bars as a streetcar-track repairman.

Metairie, which was lightly damaged in the storm, was in a frenzy of rebuilding, like Reconstruction Atlanta in "Gone with the Wind." The streets were jammed with high-riding contractors' pickups and glaziers' trucks that reflected the sun crazily in every direction. The farther into the city we drove, the thinner the traffic became. Along Napoleon Avenue, the grassy median—"neutral ground," in New Orleans parlance—was covered with cars encrusted to their roofs with mud, parked there before the storm in the belief that five extra inches of elevation would keep them dry. By the time we reached Almonaster Boulevard, in the upper Ninth Ward, there was little sign of life. As we drove, Lewis told me about his childhood in the days when New Orleans was booming and his parents' two-bedroom house on Deslonde Street was often filled with friends and relatives from the countryside. In those days, the rural blacks of the Lower Nine didn't go in for what they considered the parading-in-the-street foolishness of the Creoles in Treme. "You worked and you went to church and you played music," Lewis said. "You didn't parade." Lewis helped change that in the nineteen-eighties, when he formed the Lower Nine's first social-aid and pleasure club, the Big Nine, which combined the mutual-aid functions of the old Ninth Ward neighborhood organizations with what he called "flash and dash: a two-hundred-dollar hat, nine-hundred-dollar shoes." We crossed the Claiborne Avenue Bridge, glancing to our left at the spot where the Deslonde Street home had stood before it vanished. Under a crust of dried flood slime, storefronts testified to generations of hard times: cinder-block liquor marts, tire-repair shops with hand-lettered signs, a Popeye's Chicken. The Lower Nine didn't have a supermarket or a bank branch. For produce or credit, residents crossed into St. Bernard Parish, where they shopped on Judge Perez Drive—originally named for the same Leander Perez who had called blacks "burr-heads." Lewis's effusive cheer waned as we ventured deeper into the neighborhood. By the time we passed Fats Domino's vast white house, on Caffin Avenue, he'd grown quiet. But when we turned onto Tupelo Street, where in several yards small mountains of stained Sheetrock, lumber, and sodden mattresses rose, his face lit up. "That's progress!" he said, clapping his big hands and laughing. "That means people are coming back!"

We stopped at No. 1317, a small tan bungalow that Lewis had bought in 1978, the year after he helped organize the city's streetcar-track repairmen into the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. An orange "X" and "9/16" had been spray-painted on the door, meaning that rescuers hadn't reached the house until more than two weeks after the flood. He stood on the dead grass, pointing to house after silent house: "Miss Catherine there, she's in Atlanta. They found Christine's body in that one two weeks ago. Her son walked in and there she was. Those people there are in McComb, Mississippi." We peered through the back door of Lewis's house; the interior had been stripped to the studs by a team of University of Montana students. "Isn't that something?" Lewis said. "Came down here on their Christmas break just to help." Until Katrina, a small, freestanding garage in Lewis's back yard had contained the House of Dance and Feathers, a homemade museum dedicated to the Mardi Gras Indians and the social-aid and pleasure clubs of the Lower Nine. The museum, a ten-by-twelve room, had been officially recognized with tax-exempt status shortly before Katrina. All that remained was a muddy strip of Indian beadwork, drying on a kitchen stool. Lewis's voice took on a dreamy quality as he spoke of neighborhood crayfish boils and fish fries, of bringing meals to Miss Catherine, and of the kinship ties among neighbors who looked out for each other's children—life in the Lower Nine as painted by Norman Rockwell. When I suggested that perhaps grief was buffing his memories, Lewis insisted that the Lower Nine was never as bad as the crime and the poverty statistics suggested. "People weren't as poor as all that. At least, it didn't feel like that," he said. "People got by. Everybody knew everybody. The criming wasn't everywhere; it was, like, this corner was bad, or that parking lot." He winked. "We're able to hold more than one thought in our heads."

As planning for a new New Orleans stalled, growing numbers of students and professors arrived to see what might be salvaged of the old one. One February morning, Jeffrey Chusid was taking a break and eating a praline at Loretta's Too, a coffee shop in a run-down, arty part of the city near Elysian Fields Avenue. Chusid, a heavy-lidded man with a gray-and-white beard, teaches historic preservation at Cornell. Three graduate students sat at the table with him, studying an inventory they had made of public assets in the Ninth Ward—businesses, public buildings, parks. They were particularly excited about the Meat People, a gaudily painted market at Derbigny and Mazant, which had the look of an important neighborhood fixture. Chusid said, "The need is for everybody to be planning, so the people can say, 'This building is important; we remember the people who lived here.' Or 'You know what we liked about this street? The curbs were the right height, and the kids would sit here.'" He finished his praline, and we piled into a white minivan to continue the inventory, moving slowly along Urquhart Street. A blue van coming the other way rolled down the windows and stopped, and the occupants, another group of students, exchanged intelligence about some oak trees on Poland Street; the students were making a list of every viable tree in New Orleans, and their best estimate was that forty thousand had been lost in the storm and flood.

While Chusid cruised the neighborhoods, Kenneth Reardon, the chairman of the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell, was helping to coördinate data on the condition of New Orleans which had been gathered by teams from seventeen universities. "It's absolutely criminal—people looking out a downtown hotel window, making statements about neighborhoods they never visited much to begin with, saying nothing can be done and nobody wants to come back," Reardon said, when I reached him by phone at Cornell later that month. He couldn't imagine making plans for a city whose precise physical condition was unknown. "The first rule is: Survey before plan. The whole process should be driven by data, and people's preferences, and the reality."

Elizabeth English studies the effects of hurricanes on buildings, at the Hurricane Center of Louisiana State University, in Baton Rouge. "You need to think about how architecture helps shape culture," she said, when I met her at a back-yard dinner party in Baton Rouge. English, who is fifty-two and slight, has the intensity of someone whose career has met its most significant challenge. She is trying to save an architectural feature that is as emblematic of New Orleans as crayfish étouffée: the shotgun house. The shotgun—sometimes four to six times as long as it is wide—catches stray breezes and allows them to pass through every room. The house is too narrow to have a hall, so the rooms are lined up one behind the other. The original plantations in the Mississippi River oxbow that later cradled New Orleans were long, thin strips, starting at the river and running north, toward the lake. "People grow accustomed to the geometry in which they live," English said. When it came to laying out lots in New Orleans, they naturally laid them out long and narrow. That led to the long and narrow shotguns." The shotguns, in turn, helped develop the close-knit neighborhoods that New Orleanians love. A shotgun's salient feature is its lack of privacy. Getting from the front room to the kitchen, which is usually in the back, means walking through everybody else's room or around the outside. On the narrow lots, shotguns sit close together, so neighbors are also on top of each other. "That communal culture everybody talks about in New Orleans, that warmth, all that life on the street, you could say that originates with the need for every plantation to have a little piece of riverfront," English said. The shotguns are built of old-growth swamp cypress that resists mold, termites, and rot. "And they were built to flood." The homes were designed to drain water and dry quickly. From English's informal survey of the Lower Nine, it looked as though at least half of the houses on many blocks were shotguns. Most were in good structural shape, even those which had floated away. They needed new Sheetrock and wiring but little else, and it wouldn't cost much, she said, to jack them up in anticipation of future floods. "You just put more cinder blocks under them." A do-it-yourself owner could restore a shotgun for not much more than the amount—twenty-six thousand dollars—in reconstruction assistance that FEMA was promising to homeowners who lacked insurance. "There was this message coming out of the commission that you'd be foolish to invest in your flooded home," English said. "But that's just not true."

When I visited Mayor Nagin in his office, in February, he was awkwardly straddling the issue of the Lower Ninth Ward. His Department of Safety and Permits was handing out as many as five hundred building permits a week, regardless of location in the city. Those who could cajole city inspectors into believing that their houses were less than fifty per cent damaged got a permit to accomplish repairs. Nearly ninety per cent of applicants were able to make that case. Even as his administration was authorizing the permits in the Lower Ninth Ward, Nagin said that he thought building there was a bad idea. "I wouldn't put money in the Lower Nine," he told me. "Nowhere." Maps were the post-Katrina currency of communication, and Nagin, sitting beneath a vast abstract canvas, unfolded one of his own. He traced a finger along the path of the storm surge. The Lower Nine would remain vulnerable even if the Army Corps of Engineers closed Mr. Go, he said. "I'm comfortable with rebuilding everywhere but the Lower Nine. Yes, the Lower Nine carries that emotional charge. I have relatives who live in the Lower Nine. But I'd rather be honest and tell them exactly what the danger is."

I asked Nagin if, given the black community's hostility toward the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, he now thought that including James Reiss—who'd spoken of changing the city "demographically"—on the commission had been a mistake.

"I've known Jimmy Reiss for a long time," Nagin said. "I'm not one to throw people off because they're controversial. You need some edginess, especially in this town." Black resentment, he said, was part of "the nature of New Orleans, the negativity and self-pity." He folded his hands and bowed his head for a moment, sighing loudly. "Look," he said. "What you see in the Lower Nine—the hurt, the resentment—has been there for years. Anytime you talk about revitalization, urban planning, you're going to have people who say it's a racial thing."

"You should go sit out in the sun. Get some color. You'd look good with a tan. And a cigarette. I think you'd look really good with a tan and a cigarette."

As Nagin walked me to the door and shook hands, I asked him how he saw his prospects for reëlection. A few dozen candidates had entered the race, and a couple of especially formidable ones were about to declare. Polling a city blown apart was nearly impossible, but, given the bungled rescue, the failed Baker bill, and the woebegone state of the city six months after the storm, things did not look good for Nagin.

"Twenty-four candidates—most of them white?" he said. "You've got to be kidding. Of course I'm going to win!"

Mardi Gras fell on a sunny, cool, and dry day this year. Nagin, dressed in the desert-tan camouflage of a four-star Army general, rode a big horse at the head of the parade. Zulu, the oldest of the black Mardi Gras krewes still parading, had brought twenty-four Zulu warriors from South Africa, who danced down Jackson Street in the crisp morning sun. The Muses handed out their signature hand-strung glass beads from floats that depicted Nagin playing the "race card" in a Cajun variant of poker called bourré, and FEMA as a barrel of monkeys.

Governor Blanco, a Democrat, offered me a ride in her black S.U.V. from her downtown hotel to the main reviewing stand, a quarter of a mile away. She had lost the haggard look she'd worn during the crisis, when she was feuding with President Bush over control of the rescue, and was fresh and relaxed in a red silk jacket. "My surprise is how slow things are at every level," she said. As of that morning, not a penny of either the original six billion dollars or Bush's additional four billion had arrived in the state. (It didn't begin arriving until May.) I asked her if she thought that Louisiana's reputation for corruption was preventing Congress from acting. For months, the state treasurer, John Neely Kennedy, had been pushing Blanco to remove any whiff of impropriety by banning state officials and their families from securing reconstruction contracts. Blanco told me that she didn't like the idea. "The legislature is not a full-time job," she said. "These people have to make a living, too." I asked whether a Republican Congress and White House might be deliberately slowing the release of funds for a city that is essentially a big blue dot on an otherwise red state map. She closed her eyes. "I can't let myself go there," she said.

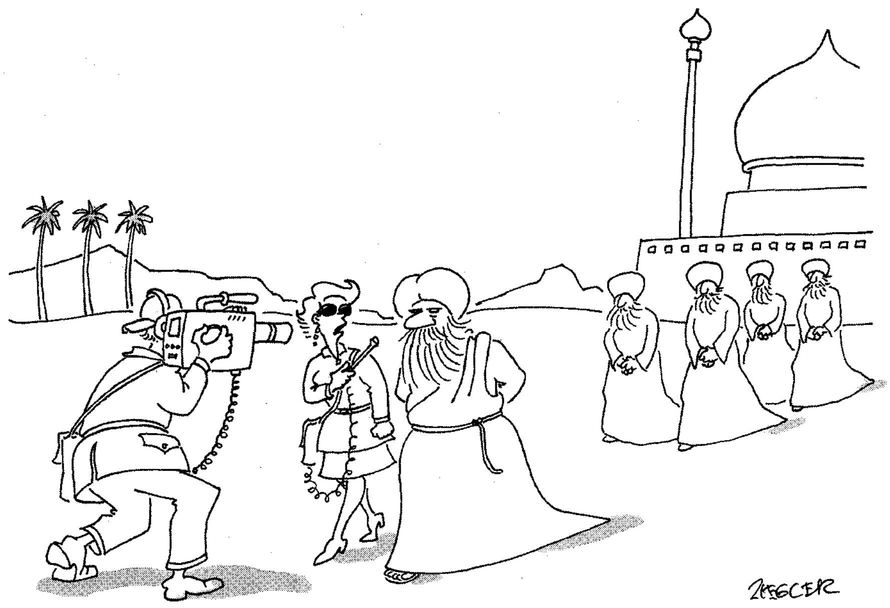
Interstate 10 casts a deep gray shadow over Claiborne Avenue, but that has never stopped black New Orleans from celebrating Mardi Gras along its noisy, smoggy, gritty length. Music thumped and blared from dozens of overamplified car radios and boom boxes, sirens wailed, and horns honked. In exchange for a twenty-dollar bill, a fat woman handed me a plastic plate holding a turkey neck, a crab, a sausage, and a pig's foot, all fished out of a waist-high pot of spicy broth. A big man approached, dressed in a black shirt and pants with white skeleton bones painted on them. His face shone with a white skull that had been daubed on. His arms were thrown wide. "I'm a bones man!" he yelled, engulfing me in a hug. It was Ronald Lewis, the streetcar-track repairman whose Mardi Gras museum had been destroyed in the flood. Masking skull-and-bones, a traditional Mardi Gras reminder of mortality, seemed appropriate, as bodies were still being discovered in ruined houses. (One was found in a house in the center of the city on May 27th, nine months after the storm. The Louisiana death toll so far is fourteen hundred and sixty-four; about eighty per cent of the victims have been found in New Orleans.)

Lewis was deliriously happy that Mardi Gras day was a sparkling one, and that so many people were back for it. Now that the Baker bill was dead, the era of waiting for that illusionary eighty billion dollars was over, and the rebuilding could finally begin. "All that waiting around hurt us." Sweat beaded on his face. "They dangle resources, and everybody waits to get them instead of just starting in." Nobody else from his block had yet returned, but Lewis was going ahead with his remodelling. "I don't care if I'm the only person on my block," he said. "I'm going to live in my house." Only in the bizarre world of the first post-Katrina Mardi Gras could the withholding of federal aid be considered good news and the prospect of living in an abandoned neighborhood victory.

In late February, about a hundred homeowners from the Lower Ninth Ward met in a church building, many of them wearing red T-shirts that said "I'm from Dat Nine and You Ain't Takin' Mine!" Along the walls, boxes of diapers, sanitary napkins, hand sanitizer, and plastic cutlery stood open for the taking. Ceiling fans barely stirred the stifling air. The crowd was angry; six months after Katrina, the Lower Nine was the only neighborhood without electricity. A man from the Small Business Administration offered loans, and a middle-aged FEMA employee stretched her smile to the breaking point as she explained the intricacies of something called "excess flood coverage." Joe Ringo, a sturdy man in his fifties with a big fuzzy beard, stood in overalls and rubber boots, leveling a finger at the FEMA official's face. "I don't know why you're down here talking to us about flood insurance," he said. "This wasn't a flood. A flood is an act of God. This was the government—the government!—doing a bad job of building levees and destroying our homes." The crowd murmured; several people yelled, "That's right!" Ringo swivelled and pointed at the S.B.A. official. "And don't you be talking about no S.B.A. loans," he said. "I don't need no loan. The government's the one needs that loan, because the government's going to pay for my house!" People cheered for this vain hope; though levees built by the Army Corps of Engineers failed, the government has never accepted liability for all the damage that ensued.

The decision to rebuild was now in the hands of residents, who, for the time being, wanted only to put things back the way they were. A few weeks after Nagin told me that he was uncomfortable rebuilding in the neighborhood, he attended a similar homeowners' meeting and announced, "We're going to rebuild all sections of New Orleans, including the Lower Ninth Ward!"

The last hope for a planned recovery ended a little more than a month later, on April 12th, when FEMA released its long-awaited floodplain guidelines. Instead of ruling out redevelopment in low-lying areas, the agency had essentially left floodplain elevations unchanged. The only new rule was that some builders would have to raise new houses three feet off the ground. Sean Reilly, of the state planning authority—who had hoped that the FEMA guidelines would make rebuilding decisions a matter of safety rather than of racial politics—was incredulous. The three-feet requirement seemed both arbitrary and pointless in an area where water had run over rooftops. He told me that the agency had "simply abdicated" its responsibility. "They took away our moral authority to tell people what to do," he said. "We staked our authority to move people to higher ground on the maps." Instead, authority had devolved to homeowners. The latest plan from Blanco's commission was to give homeowners the pre-Katrina value of their homes—up to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars—minus any insurance settlements or FEMA assistance they'd already received. The pre-Katrina value of many New Orleans homes, particularly in the Lower Ninth Ward, was far less than a hundred and fifty thousand dollars—too little to buy a house elsewhere in the city. So, instead of encouraging people to move to higher ground, Blanco's commission ended up doing the opposite: encouraging people, especially those in the lowest-lying and poorest neighborhoods, to stay put and fix up their houses. The state expects to start handing out checks this month. "There isn't much to be done now," Reilly said, morosely.



"To hold in your hand the spiritual destinies of several billion people, Your Holiness, has got to be a rush."

The mayoral primary election, on April 22nd, whittled the vast field of candidates down to two, Nagin and the state's mild-mannered lieutenant governor, Mitch Landrieu, but the contest gained little substance. Landrieu, whose family—his father, Moon, was the city's last white mayor, and his sister, Mary, is a United States senator—has long been notable for its efforts to reach across the color line, banked on a clash of styles: a staid hard worker against a charismatic loose cannon. As Ron Forman, who came in third, put it when he endorsed Landrieu, "It's not the plan now; it's the man." On Election Night, May 20th, the man, of course, turned out to be Nagin, by fifty-two percentage points to forty-eight. The blacker and more flooded a precinct was, the more likely its majority had voted for Nagin. But the results showed a lot of crossover, too. New Orleans is full of conservatives who would never vote for a Landrieu, and of blacks furious that Nagin left them sitting on their roofs, or sweltering in the Superdome.

At his victory celebration at the Marriott, Nagin breezed up to the microphone and lavished thanks upon President Bush for what will, if it ever arrives, amount to between ten and twenty per cent of what the city originally believed would be coming. "You and I have been the most vilified politicians in this country," he said to Bush, directing his comments over the heads of his cheering supporters and toward the TV cameras. "But I want to thank you for moving that promise you made in Jackson Square forward."

The morning after the election, before a small group of reporters in the community room of a Treme church, Nagin did not address the question of whether some parts of the city might have to be abandoned. "People are starting to say, 'Well, maybe there are parts of town that can't come back,'" he said. But he wasn't going to force it. Invoking eminent domain would be political suicide. Withholding services would be certain to prompt civil-rights lawsuits. "We're not going to choke people out of city services," Nagin said. "Everything that's getting city services now will continue to get them." He didn't specify how the devastated city would extend schools, garbage pickup, buses, and other services to homes widely dispersed amid acres of wreckage. Three new committees, which included a couple of Republicans who had run against him, would take up those details. This was a day to celebrate, he said; President Bush had just called and was "pretty excited" about the election results. "I think the opportunity has presented itself for me to kind of go down in history as the mayor that guided the city of New Orleans through an incredible rebuild cycle, and really eliminated a lot of the pre-Katrina problems that we had with blight, with crime, with the public-school system."

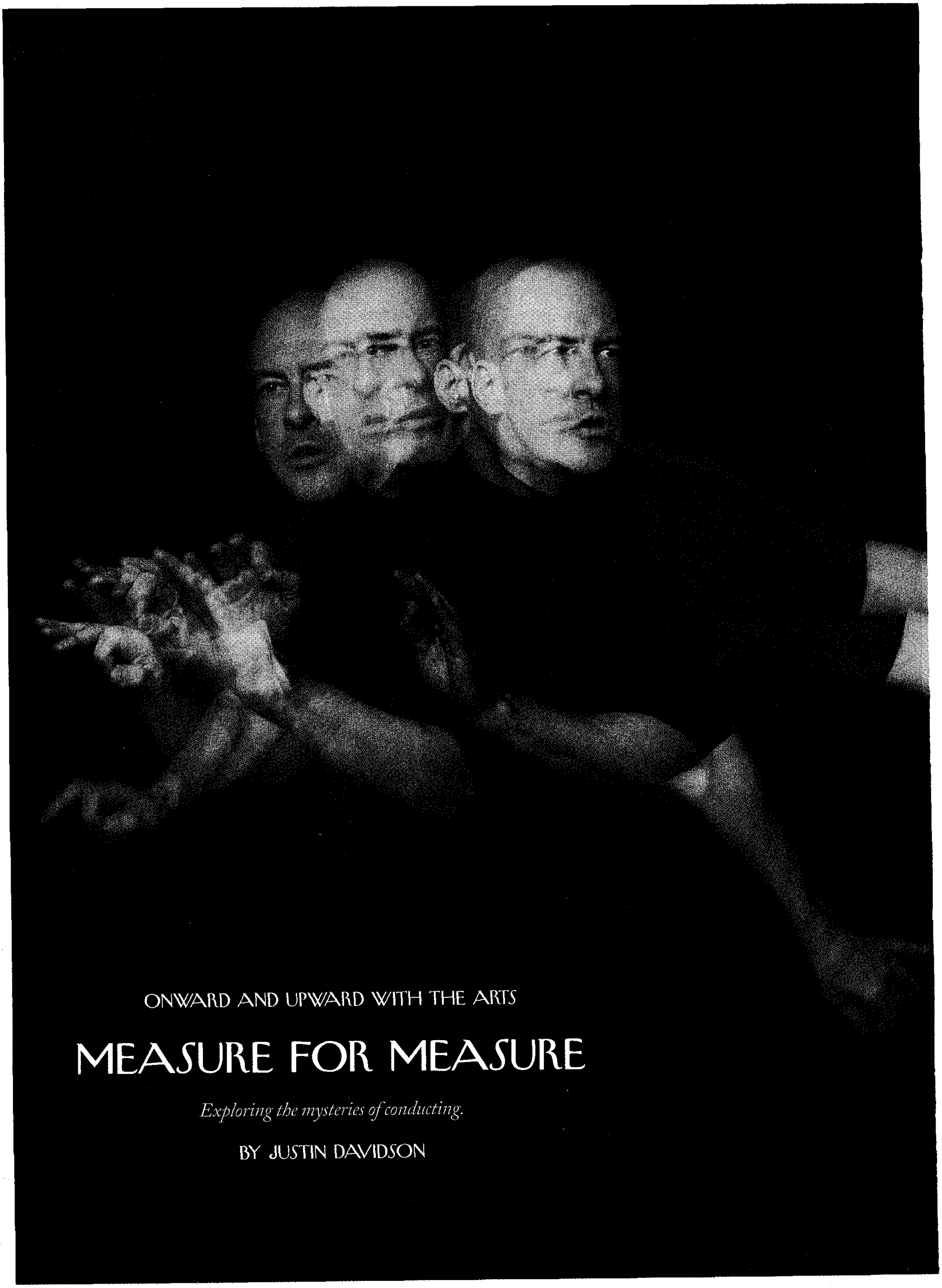
That evening, I drove east from the French Quarter, downriver, along St. Claude Avenue and into the Ninth Ward. St. Claude was busy, but when I turned north onto Alvar Street, into the area that flooded, I found myself in a ghost town. As I crossed the Claiborne Avenue Bridge into the Lower Nine. I could see, from the peak of the bridge, the freshly repaired breach in the Industrial Canal. The Army Corps of Engineers had mounded the levee there higher than before, and built along its top a white concrete floodwall that from above looked as thin as paper. Three recent studies of New Orleans's flood-protection system make grim reading. A University of California at Berkeley study found that the Army Corps of Engineers—pressed by the contrary demands of "better, faster, and cheaper"—had over the years done such a bad job of building and managing New Orleans's levees and floodwalls that, even with post-Katrina repairs, the city remained in as much peril as before. The corps itself, in a report of more than six thousand pages, acknowledged that it had built a hurricane-protection system "in name only," and that it had done almost everything wrong, from assessing risk to choosing technologies. An article in the journal *Nature* found that the city and its levees are sinking into the Mississippi Delta mud much faster than anyone thought. In some places, the authors wrote, New Orleans is sinking by an inch a year, and some parts of the levee system are now three feet lower than their builders intended. In the following months, there was more bad news. Street violence grew so alarming—five teen-agers were shot dead in a single incident one night—that Mayor Nagin had to call in the National Guard to help patrol the streets. As much as two billion dollars in federal disaster relief was discovered to have been wasted or stolen, and last week a survey found that little more than a third of the pre-Katrina population had returned. The fate of the Lower Ninth Ward and the rest of the city remains anyone's guess. New Orleanians tend to talk about the prospects of another devastating flood in the fatalistic way that people in the fifties talked about nuclear war. They know that they are living under the ever-present threat of annihilation. They want the people in power to do all they can to prevent it. But, in the meantime, there's nothing to do but soldier on. A few days ago, Ronald Lewis left a cheerful message on my answering machine: "Dan, we have rededicated the House of Dance and Feathers!"

On my last night in New Orleans, I crisscrossed eastward, away from the breach. Most of the wrecked houses that had blocked the street had been removed; on only a few blocks did I have to back up to detour around a bungalow listing across the pavement. Debris crunched under my tires. Street lights were on, but no lights shone from windows. Doors stood open to dark interiors. On Lizardi Street, a half dozen young black men sat in the gloom on the front steps of a ruined house. They wore brilliant-white T-shirts as big as muumuus and heavy jewelry that sparkled in the dim light. Two doors down, on an unlit porch, a seventy-three-year-old homeowner named Ernest Penns sat slumped in an old kitchen chair. He wore glasses and had a full head of spiky gray hair, and the gold in his crooked brown teeth looked as if it had been applied with a garden trowel. He said that he didn't need anything, and patted a heavy leather-bound Bible in his lap. "I got everything I need right here." He led me inside. The single-story bungalow was lit by a battery-powered camping lantern. It smelled heavily of mildew and chlorine. "I washed the walls down with bleach," he said, gesturing at the panelling.

I asked if he worried about the mold that was blooming inside the walls.

"This is not the worst thing that's ever happened to me," he said. He pulled up his T-shirt to reveal a boiling purple scar. "In 1972, I was stabbed with a screwdriver. Drove myself to the hospital." The incident had made him stop drinking and become a Christian, he said. Twelve years later, he had saved enough to buy this house, for thirty-six thousand dollars. Now, with many more years of payments on it, he was getting by on Social Security. He had water service but no electricity or gas, so he drove across the Industrial Canal a couple of times a day to get something to eat at a Wendy's or a Subway.

We walked back onto the porch, and he kicked aside a can of TAT Roach & Ant Killer so that I could sit down. The street light on the corner flickered. A gold Lexus with complicated free-moving hubcaps, its subwoofers booming like a giant heart, screeched to a halt at the house two doors up. Penns and I listened to the young men laughing and shouting to each other. "They're plying their trade," he said. "They're not what we need around here, but they're part of this community, and it's something we can't control." A police car rolled by once in a while, he said. I asked him how often. "About every five days." I felt my way down the steps and said goodbye. Penns raised a hand and waved, barely visible in the gloom. ♦



ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Exploring the mysteries of conducting.

BY JUSTIN DAVIDSON

The American conductor Robert Spano raised his eyebrows and his baton, and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra dug into a smoky, "Bolero"-like dance. He was nearing the end of two tense and fatiguing days of recording a new opera, "Ainadamar," in the orchestra's concert hall, a half-buried concrete box. The base of his spine twitched to the beat, as if jolts of current were running through it. He grinned at the cellos, giving them a quick thumbs-up, and cued the trumpets by pretending to flick a cigarette butt at them.

When the music stopped, his body kept going. In the seconds before the next take, he accompanied his instructions to the players with a rapid series of gesticulations that even a musician sitting out of earshot could have understood. He made as if to squeeze an orange. (The message: "Give me a succulent tone.") He then mimed sliding a toy car down a ramp ("But don't drag; push right into the next beat"), whisking eggs ("Keep the sound vibrant"), and swatting a Ping-Pong ball ("Give the phrase a sharp, light bounce").

A white telephone next to his podium rang, and Spano listened as the opera's composer, Osvaldo Golijov, dictated some changes in the score. Golijov, along with a producer and a few engineers, was sitting in a windowless room backstage, linked to the auditorium by speakers and a TV monitor. "We've never done it that way before, but O.K.," Spano said amiably; a decade of working with Golijov has taught him that a new piece of his is not a fixed object. The conductor hung up and instantly translated Golijov's comments into a command. "A little more *schmeary*," he told the violins, dragging his open palm through the air, as if he were slathering a dozen bagels with cream cheese. When the red "Record" light, suspended above the orchestra, turned on, the dance instantly became more fluid, the melody sexier: less clop, more sway.

Spano is a small, perpetually quivering man of forty-five, with wire-rimmed glasses, a crescent of hair at the back of his head, and the searing gaze once cultivated by Weimar intellectuals. Spending time with him is both invigorating and exhausting. When he can bring himself to sit down, his leg bounces; his speech careers between erudition and profanity. "Fuck you very large" is one of his favorite expressions, and after using it he is apt to burst into hacking guffaws.

On the podium, Spano marshals this jerky urgency and uses it to kindle the orchestra. "Each conductor enters the music through some key technique," Bruce Kenney, a horn player, told me. "Some conductors are happy when we play together and in tune—precision comes first. Other conductors base their interpretation on the pacing, the tempo, and the energy. Other conductors want a particular sound. Robert's an energy guy."

I first met Spano a decade ago, after he had been appointed music director of the tottering Brooklyn Philharmonic and gave one performance after another in which rattling excitement overcame the often scrappy playing. I particularly relished a rough but light-filled performance of scenes from Olivier Messiaen's cathedral-like opera, "Saint François d'Assise."

When the recording of "Ainadamar" was finished, Spano, whose coiled alertness had never flagged, retreated to an underground suite with Golijov, the soprano Dawn Upshaw, and a crowd of singers, Latin percussionists, and orchestra administrators for some celebratory drinking. Spano poured himself shots of vodka and playfully toasted his colleagues. It took more than an hour for his adrenaline to ebb.

Even a merely competent conductor transmits a huge amount of musical information instantaneously, accurately, and virtually wordlessly. How quick or flexible the pulse should be, how biting a staccato, how distended a pause, how graceful a phrase, how heavy a march—one person with a stick channels this constant flow of minutiae to a hundred players, talking only sparingly in rehearsal and not at all in concert.

It's a mysterious mechanism that allows this to happen, a gestural form of communication that has no international semaphore. Each maestro has a personal dialect: what one conductor achieves with a minuscule vibration of a finger, another will accomplish with a sledgehammer swing of an arm. From the audience's point of view, the process looks wizardly. At eight o'clock on a Friday night, the maestro brandishes a wand and summons rich strains of music, brimming with passion and philosophy.

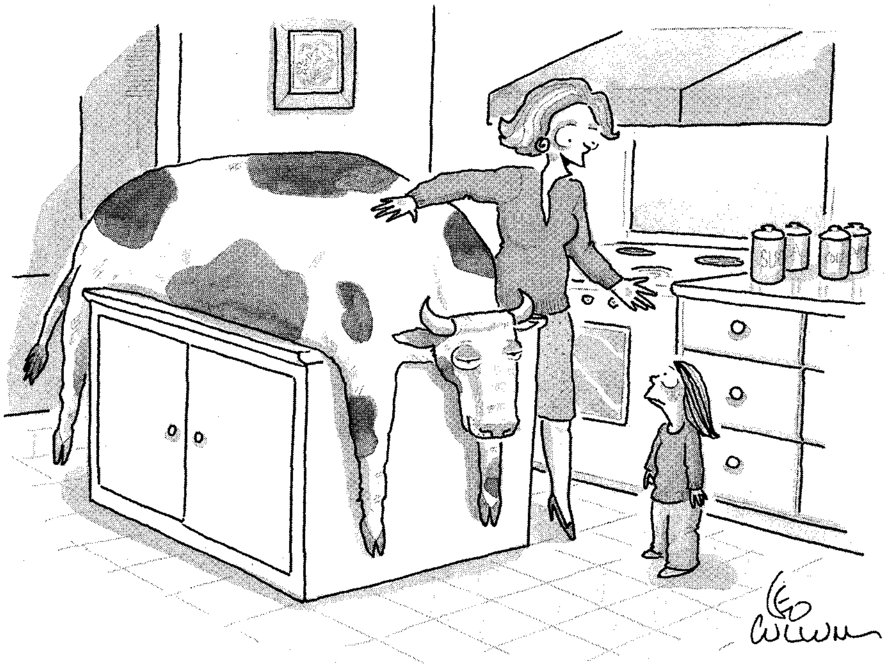
The conducting profession is less than two hundred years old. In the eighteenth century, violinists or harpsichordists often led the ensemble. In French opera, someone, frequently the composer, stood in the wings and noisily kept time by striking the stage with a staff. (In 1687, Jean-Baptiste Lully died after he impaled his foot while directing one of his compositions; the wound led to a fatal case of gangrene.) In the nineteenth century, the orchestra leader stopped producing any sound directly, and instead led by waving a rolled-up sheet of paper or a violin bow.

The German composer Ludwig Spohr claimed to have introduced the baton in 1820, and, in the ensuing decades, conductors transformed themselves from bandleaders into artists. Felix Mendelssohn's combination of musicianship and charisma turned him into one of the first celebrity interpreters. Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner earned fame and money on the podium even though their compositions were deemed suspect. By the eighteen-eighties, the critic Eduard Hanslick was asserting that the best conductors controlled every note and inflection emanating from the musicians under their command. Hans von Bülow, he wrote, "conducts the orchestra as if it were a little bell in his hand."

At its most basic level, conducting an orchestra involves indicating how often the downbeat arrives, by tapping against the inner sides of an imaginary box. For a four-beat measure, the baton bounces down, left, right, up, and then down again, in an expansive sign of the cross. A three-beat measure resembles another benediction: down for the Father, right for the Son, up for the Holy Spirit.

Learning these movements is simple. But keeping time in a symphony is a

Robert Spano, the Atlanta Symphony's conductor, marshals a jerky urgency to enliven his players. Photographs by Steve Pyke.



"Mommy wants you to know where your food comes from."

• •

complex matter; not even a steady four-four pulse is straightforward. In classical music, time behaves like a Slinky, stretching and compressing without ever losing its shape. Played too strictly, the most regular music would sound mechanical, but a tempo that is too fluid and personal feels chaotic and self-indulgent. A great conductor has a powerful internal sense of where each piece's natural limits are—at what point a slowing of the tempo will edge from the expansive into the grotesque, or how long a hesitation is needed before the gallop to the final cadence. When James Levine conducts Wagner at the Metropolitan Opera, he approaches the outer limits of slow. The effect, when it works, is like staying in the pause at the top of a swing, suspended between rapture and collapse. When it doesn't, it's like squelching through mud.

The deftly wielded baton also shapes the music's character—whether, for example, the strings should burrow into a deep Straussian shag or the winds give off a gelid Stravinskyan glint. The American composer and conductor Ingolf Dahl, who died in 1970, presented his students with a précis of stick technique: moving the hand up and down produces quick tempos and staccato articulation; moving it along a left-right axis will naturally slow the tempo and soften the accents; pushing out from the torso raises the volume; bringing the hands in toward the armpits will turn it down.

James Conlon, an American conductor who spent nine years as the principal conductor of the Paris Opéra, told me that a maestro's gestures fall into two groups, which might be described as "Get ready!" and "Go!" The "ready" gestures indicate an imminent event, such as a sudden acceleration, a surge in ferocity, or a harp glissando coming after many minutes without so much as a *plink.* A conductor clumsy enough to snap for an accented chord without preparing the orchestra is likely to get only a sloppy, hectic blurt.

Such attempts to systematize the gestures of conducting are rare, however. One of the standard textbooks, "The Grammar of Conducting: A Comprehensive Guide to Baton Technique and Interpretation," by the late Max Rudolf, downplays the physical aspects of the art. Rudolf offers the following instructions on the first bar of Weber's opera "Der Freischütz," in which the orchestra enters on a soft C and rumbles toward a forte on the same note, one octave higher: "If the forearm has sufficient intensity and the facial expression is convincing, you can indicate the crescendo . . . with small baton gestures, even without using the left hand."

The morning after the Atlanta recording session, Robert Spano led an easygoing rehearsal for an all-Beethoven concert, then drove me to lunch at the Colonnade, a roadside restaurant that he described as "a cross between a nursing home and a gay bar." As he ate soggy fried chicken and drank sweet iced tea, he looked as relaxed as he ever gets. That week, he had just two subscription concerts. In the decade before he joined the Atlanta Symphony, in 2001, he had no fixed address, travelling constantly between guest performances in Europe and the United States.

In a guest appearance, a maestro shows up for a first working session on a Tuesday morning, leads another rehearsal or two on Wednesday, and leaves Saturday night, right after the concert. The conductor must develop an instant rapport with his players, since musicians ignore messages they feel are wrong, irrelevant, or unclear. At that point, the conductor isn't conducting at all; he is a helpless bystander.

"When I was younger and I was conducting new orchestras all the time, I was terrified of screwing up," Spano said. "I went around with this constant sense of discomfort: Are they going to like me? Now it doesn't matter so much. Nobody's liked everywhere, and if I go to an orchestra and it doesn't work I just won't come back, and I'll go somewhere else."

A second category of conducting involves a relationship that takes shape and settles over time. A music director and his orchestra develop an old married couple's sensitivity to glances and signals. Several years ago, I watched Levine, who has spent most of his adult life at the Met, take his pit orchestra through a passage from Wagner's "Die Walküre." Levine sat on a bar stool in the Met's basement rehearsal room, grinning serenely and undemonstratively marking the beat. After several minutes, he stopped, flipped back a few pages, and said, "Horns, it should pop a little there." The same passage began again, only this time the whole orchestra—especially the strings—sounded bristling and febrile. Later, I asked him how he had managed to hinge a metamorphosis on one detail, and he replied that the only way to understand such a moment would be to

SOCIAL DIARY BY BRUCE McCALL

ON THE OCCASION OF THE MARRIAGE OF
DEAR LEADER KIM JONG IL AND MRS. KIM JONG IL

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Program of Events

Shadowboxing Tournament, Pyongyang A.C.

(WINNER BY VIRTUAL KNOCKOUT: DEAR LEADER KIM JONG IL)

Test Firing of the Nuptial Nuclear Missile

"DAY OF UNMITIGATED JOY FOR EVEN THE REVANCHIST
JACKAL-HYENA HOOLIGAN STOOGE POSEURS"

Demolition Derby

GREAT LAWN OF THE KIM JONG IL PUTT-N-PLAY
(VICTOR: DEAR LEADER KIM JONG IL, 2006 BENTLEY ARNAGE)

Oat Champagne Reception, Palace of Bolts

CHAMPAGNE DONATED BY DEAR LEADER VINEYARD COLLECTIVE

Bridal Signing of Pre-Nup

WITNESSED BY DEAR LEADER KIM JONG IL
AND THE CHIEF OF INTELLIGENCE OF THE PEOPLE'S BETROTHAL POLICE

Exchange of Wedding Tirades

THE REVEREND KIM JONG IL OFFICIATING
(INCLUDES ATTEMPT TO BREAK GUINNESS BOOK OF WORLD RECORDS
MARK FOR LENGTH OF KIM JONG IL SPEECH, BY KIM JONG IL)

People's Court Emergency Loyalty Interrogation

MRS. KIM JONG IL, BEST MAN ,WEDDING-ORCHESTRA XYLOPHONIST, OTHERS
(ALL-HIGHEST MAGISTRATE KIM JONG IL, PRESIDING)

Wedding Feast, Dear Leader Kim Jong Il Bunker 23

(BRING YOUR OWN EATS!)

Bridal Rice Throw via Nuclear Test Missile

"VIGILANT SPIRIT OF THE RESOLUTE-BRIDESMAID PHALANX"

Wedding Party March-Past and Review

(UNARMED)

Bride and Groom Mount Getaway Tank

(HONEYMOON OFFICIALLY COMMENCES)

~

All Back to Work!

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know his thirty-year history with the group, examine the way newer members interacted with veterans, and grasp the relationship between that passage and every other score the orchestra had recently been playing.

When I recounted the incident to Spano, he nodded. Levine's comment to the horns, he said, was less important than the underlying message: *Watch me here*. "People communicate much more by facial expressions and body language than with words," Spano said. "When you first meet someone, how is it that you know almost instantly whether you like that person or not? It's about the face. So is conducting. I can communicate an immense amount about how I feel about this music just by looking at the musicians. I can command their attention by paying attention to them. And then I don't have to do very much. If I want one person to play one note louder, all I have to do is look at him and do this"—he stared at me and crooked his finger in a tiny, summoning motion.

He went on, "You have to use the gesture that will elicit the right response, not the gesture that shows what the music sounds like. For example, if I'm doing Beethoven's Third Symphony, after the first two big chords the violins and violas start their engines while the cellos have a rather homespun tune. If I start conducting the cello melody, then the *dugga-dugga* of the violins and violas is going to be a mess. If I just keep a sharp, clear beat going, the violins and violas will stay together and the cellos will take care of themselves." Once a pattern is set, the conductor can ease off until it changes, like a driver on cruise control. "I love doing nothing," Spano said, grinning. "I love the feeling of the orchestra just going crazy and doing all this fantastic stuff, and I'm just along for the ride."

Spano taught at Tanglewood for six years and has trained dozens of aspiring maestros, but he has doubts about the effectiveness of pedagogy. "I begin from the premise that this stuff can't be taught," he said. "That way, I feel less guilty for screwing people up. So I keep focussed on the things that can be taught: how to make a clean gesture, where to place a downbeat, how to study the music." Memorizing the standard repertoire is a feat equivalent to learning by heart the complete works of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Shaw, and most conductors spend an enormous amount of time in solitude, poring over scores, banging them out at the piano, disassembling them into harmonies, melodic motifs, and structural diagrams, puzzling out why the composers arranged those elements in the way they did.

Spano continued, "What I can't teach people, however, is intention. If you have a clear intention, if the stereo inside your head is clicking along and giving you something that's exactly what you want, then it almost doesn't matter what you do with your hands."

A few weeks later, Spano stopped by my apartment, in New York, to watch a DVD, "The Art of Conducting: Legendary Conductors of a Golden Era." He had agreed to decode the performances of his forebears. "I feel like a retired football player on ESPN calling the plays," he joked, as we paused, rewound, and replayed a five-minute excerpt of Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting Richard Strauss's rollicking tone poem "Till Eulenspiegels Lustige Streiche," in 1950.

Furtwängler, with his gangly body, bald head, and expression of puzzled seriousness, resembled a disoriented stork. To me, his regular beating and the generic back-and-forth of his huge left hand did not look as if they could possibly account for the molten sound pouring from the Berlin Philharmonic.

"*Ooh*, that's fantastic," Spano said. "He's hot! He's got comic timing. They feel his attention. When he looks to the woodwinds, they know they're the foreground. I have to rethink this piece. He gets this German beer-hall stupid kind of thing going, which is perfect for this piece, and he got it not by shaping but by doing nothing and pulling back the tempo just a bit so that it's *thunk! thunk! thunk!*" Spano punched his palm to imitate the tread of boots on sawdust.

We skipped ahead to a segment from 1931, in which Willem Mengelberg led the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam in the Hungarian march from Berlioz's opera "La Damnation de Faust." Spano chuckled at the small, wild-eyed, wild-haired Mengelberg, who resembled Gene Wilder, frantically windmilling his arms. "He has an approach to this that's *sempre accelerando*"—constant acceleration—"so he's got to make sure that everyone's with him," Spano said. "He's paying attention to the back of the orchestra, or they'll be late; that's why his arms are so high. He's really working hard. If he were keeping a steady tempo, he wouldn't have to work so hard. It's always about to come apart at any moment, which is what makes it exciting. It must be so inspiring being in a room with a hundred nervous people being led by a wack job! He's obviously somewhat limited in technical ability, but I'm convinced there's a lot coming out of his eyes."

"The Art of Conducting" opens with footage, from 1969, of Herbert von Karajan leading the Berlin Philharmonic in a rehearsal of Strauss's swaggering "Ein Heldenleben." Karajan, who died in 1989, was a generation younger than Furtwängler and Mengelberg, and to watch him at work was to see an art form acquire a newfound elegance. Compared with Karajan, who had a cat burglar's grace, his precursors seemed murky and spastic.

"Ein Heldenleben" begins with a leonine growl in the cellos and basses, which Karajan released with a two-handed bouncing downbeat. He sat on a bar stool, his left hand mostly parked on his knee while he drew the baton through the air like a needle through velvet. When Karajan's left arm did move, his whole body moved with it, leaning deeply into a plush accent. "That chord is fantastic!" Spano said. "He doesn't want a 'bump'; he wants a *whoomph-fff*."

Karajan belonged to the first cohort of postwar conductors, and he and Leonard Bernstein essentially invented the figure of the itinerant super-maestro. Spano and I watched Bernstein at work, too, and we were both struck by how disciplined and clear his movements were, despite his tendency to dance at the podium. Why had the conductors who ascended after the Second World War developed a technique that was so much more specific and detailed than it had been before?

In the early twentieth century, imperial conductors had commanded a repertoire that was often limited to a small coterie of composers, and they frequently asked orchestra players to rehearse the same piece dozens of times. A half century later, the musical canon had grown dauntingly large and complex; moreover, a representative of the musicians' union hovered at the conductor's elbow, making sure that rehearsals didn't drag on too long. Meanwhile, the jet plane had made it possible for maestros to drop in on orchestras in New York, London, and Vienna in a single week, and orchestras were giving more concerts each year. Musicians had to learn new music very quickly, and rehearsals became brutally efficient. Bernstein, Karajan, and their nomadic peers developed the conducting tools they needed to elicit transcendence without wasting time. By the time the British conductor Simon Rattle had taken over the Berlin Philharmonic, in 2002, that orchestra (and most others like it) was expected to whip together virtually any composition in a few rehearsals, under any capable conductor, and be able to perform it with sterling accuracy.

Precise gestures produce precise sound, and the blossoming of technique after the Second World War was accompanied by a musical fetish for clarity. Pierre Boulez developed a fearsome gestural repertoire for executing the hyper-complex rhythms of modern compositions, including the ability to mark a different beat pattern with each hand. Boulez's approach, which arose as a response to the specific demands of modern compositions, soon spread to music of all periods, because it matched the needs of the global music industry—the high-fidelity LP, for example, captured every flaw in an orchestral performance.

The musical consequences of this trend have not been entirely salutary. Furtwängler relied on degrees of vagueness, especially in Strauss, where he regularly allowed the edges of a chord to bleed, and let the waves of fast fiddle notes gurgle indistinctly. Nowadays a hazy softness is judiciously applied in performance—Rattle does so exquisitely in Debussy—but it has become a special effect. Rattle's performance of "Ein Heldenleben" with the Berlin Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall in January was full of precision-magnified detail. You could make out the highlights on all those crystalline tremolos and follow the curve of each dewdrop pizzicato. Modern conducting sometimes feels like a glass skyscraper: initially thrilling, but finally irritating, in its relentless sheen.

Some conductors have resisted this new era of corporate efficiency. Spano and I watched the notoriously reluctant maestro Carlos Kleiber leading the Vienna Philharmonic in Brahms's Second

Symphony, in 1991. Kleiber conducted rarely, but when he did he conjured an atmosphere of bliss. His gestures were sporadic and vague; mainly, he leaned lovingly toward the orchestra, seeming less like a leader than like an enraptured listener. "This wouldn't work with any other orchestra in the world," Spano said. "He's giving no rhythmic impulse whatsoever! But he's getting this *amazing* line. It's glorious."

Teresa Marrin Nakra, a music professor at the College of New Jersey, in Ewing, has spent a large part of her career attempting to prove that even misty techniques for generating glory, such as Kleiber's, can be plotted on a graph. A violinist in high school and an aspiring conductor at Harvard, Nakra eventually decided that what she really wanted to do was find out how conducting works. In 1994, she began a master's program at the M.I.T. Media Lab; she finished her doctorate six years later.

Nakra took as her starting point the work of the Austrian psychiatrist Gerhart Harrer, who in the nineteen-seventies had fitted Karajan out with sensors and measured his vital signs during a performance of Beethoven's "Leonore" Overture No. 3. About halfway through the overture, just where it reaches its emotional peak and veers into minor, Karajan's heart rate leaped to a hundred and fifty beats per minute—quite rapid for a man in his sixties. Karajan liked piloting jets as well as orchestras; Harrer accompanied him to an airstrip, hooked him up with electrodes, and asked him to perform some airborne stunts. As Karajan dived toward earth, feinted toward a landing, and then, at the last moment, pulled the plane's nose back into a climb, the EKG needle hopped, but only gently. Beethoven had released a much more powerful spurt of adrenaline than buzzing an airstrip had.

Harrer had shown that conducting can provoke physiological reactions that mirror the emotional contours of a score. Nakra's goal was to decode those physical events and translate them into software. She wanted to develop a computer that could track a conductor's gestures. "The Holy Grail of computer science is to capture the messy complexity of the natural world and express it algorithmically," she told me. "Music expression can be measured quantitatively."

At first, she tried building a digital baton, which relayed its movements to a computer. But the tool was so packed with electronics that it looked and felt like a truncheon. Next, Nakra lined a body-hugging tunic with sensors—a "conductor's jacket," she called it in her dissertation—and placed it on several Boston-area maestros. "Conductors often shape the apparent viscosity of the air," she said. "To get a string legato, they'll make it look like they're moving the baton through molasses. So can we measure the muscle contraction in such a way as to show that?"

Nakra has used her data to build various conducting simulators. One installation has been making the rounds of children's museums: kids conduct a video of the Boston Pops, and when they swing an electronic baton faster the orchestra onscreen speeds up. She has built a digital conducting lab for Arizona State University which allows students to focus on technical problems by leading a synthetic ensemble. And she has made some progress in codifying actions that conductors execute without thinking. Leading up to a big fortissimo climax, conductors often relax and do nothing for an instant before giving the cue—a moment called "preparatory inhibition." Nakra also found that the sensors could distinguish between a meaningful gesture and an incidental movement: marking a beat produced regular spikes on a graph; a hand turning a page of the score looked like a shapeless blot.

Nakra eventually concluded that mapping the significance and effectiveness of conductors' movements is a lifelong project. "I believe that the whole reason we have live music is because of this great emotional, improvisational—but also planned—thing that's going on," she said. "It's inherently unpredictable, but it also has to be concrete. One human being is passing that information to another. If we're going to eliminate E.S.P., then the mechanism must be visual. Which means that we can at least observe it, so maybe we can measure it."

If any conductor lends himself to scientific measurement, it would be Lorin Maazel, the frighteningly competent music director of the New York Philharmonic. Critics regularly express frustration with his capricious interpretations, but nobody challenges his ability to get an orchestra to produce any effect he desires. By slowing the baton's passage through the air, he can stretch a melodic sigh and let it hang there, until he cares to complete the thought. He can nudge a crescendo with a twitch, and often seems to do so not from any deep musical conviction but simply because he can.

On the morning after the Philharmonic's opening-night gala last fall, the orchestra assembled on the stage of Avery Fisher Hall for its first regular rehearsal of the season. At precisely ten o'clock, Maazel ambled out to the podium. He muttered a perfunctory "Good morning," and began leading the orchestra through Mahler's Symphony No. 1 without even opening the score that sat on his music stand. His next words, three-quarters of an hour later, were "Third bar of A, third movement." The music started again. Maazel saw no need to voice corrections or explanations. His gestures were economical, too. He quieted a grumble of double-basses by waggling three fingers in front of his lips. His eyebrows contracted, and the strings produced a rich, honeyed sound. A moment later, the eyebrows lifted, and the tone became lyrical and light. Just before a brass fusillade in the fourth movement, Maazel glanced toward the back of the orchestra and cocked his left index finger. At the appointed instant, he brought the digit down as if flipping a switch, and the horns burst into a fearless fortissimo. The rehearsal, though virtually flawless, had an oddly inert feel; it seemed more like a collective limbering up than like a bout of artistic labor.

A few days later, Maazel slouched in an armchair in his fourth-floor studio, and said that it was important for rehearsals to be relaxing. "I don't think that after a rehearsal of mine the musicians feel exhausted," he said proudly. Maazel was a rare conducting prodigy—he had led most of the major American orchestras by the age of fifteen. Now, at seventy-six, he radiates ease and intuition in his profession: for him, memorizing scores is effortless, and so is hearing that the third bassoon's staccato has gone a little soft.

"It's always puzzled me why so many folks haven't learned to listen," he said.

"It's very simple to learn, and, once you've learned it, you have accomplished the first task of the conductor: to put the musician at ease so that he knows where he's at and so that he's well integrated into the total picture. That transforms the sound in a tenth of a second from something that is amorphous, unfocussed, and uncertain into a sound that is synchronized and together, because your musician, having been put at ease, is then able to do what he does at home. He's thinking of beauty of sound, breath control, phrasing."

He paused for a sixteenth-note rest before speaking again, in a tone that mirrored his musical style: assured, decisive, slightly anodyne. "Seven out of ten conductors—some very fine musicians—make motions and choreograph the music but don't have a clue of how to put the orchestra at ease, so that the musicians hunker down and don't look anymore and fall back on their own resources, and you get a stodgy, stiff sound." Productive serenity, he added, flows from the conductor's own command of the score, and his ability to empathize with the musicians.

"Conducting from memory is obviously important," he went on. "You're dealing with a hundred musicians who are seated in front of you and you get to know them by looking. You have a reel in your head of the performance you're conducting, and every once in a while what you're seeing doesn't match your reel. In two bars, the second trumpet is supposed to play a passage and he hasn't raised his trumpet. A conductor who's got his head in the score isn't going to catch that. Even when people are counting their seventy-three measures of rest correctly, there can be a doubt. Which is where cuing comes in. Take the opening of Dvořák's 'New World' Symphony, and that brass chord that so many people have trouble getting together. I *become* a brass player. I'm integrated into the task that they have, which is puckering up and blowing. I breathe, I don't move, and it's perfect."

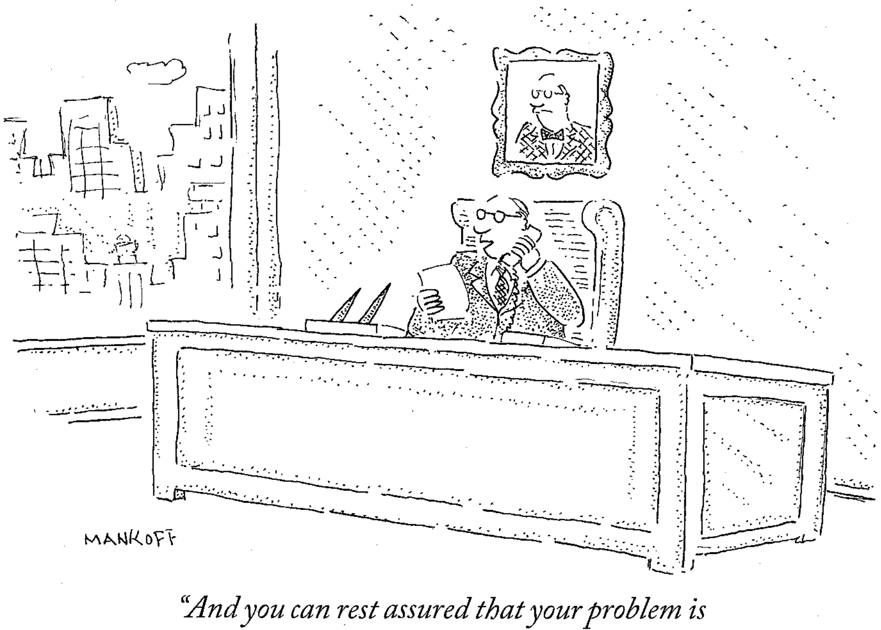
For the members of the Philharmonic, Maazel's light-fingered virtuosity represents a huge change from the style of his predecessor, Kurt Masur, who communicated more with vague elbow-wagging and shoulder-shrugging than with clear hand signals. What Masur could not suggest with gestures, he extracted by force of personality. The Philharmonic was a fractious place during Masur's tenure, from 1991 to 2002. Masur got into fights with the administration, musicians grumbled, and the board of directors finally nudged him out. (He now leads the Orchestre National de France.) Many of the concerts Masur led were sluggish, but he conjured some luminous Mendelssohn and fierce Shostakovich. The remarkable performance of Brahms's "Ein Deutsches Requiem" that Masur led nine days after the September 11th attacks was full of fluid warmth and muted fire.

Glenn Dicterow, the Philharmonic's concertmaster, told me, "Masur never gave up. He just worked and worked until he got it. Maazel has so much control that he can do tempos on the fly. He rehearses less. He likes to keep it fresh. It's an easier life."

Life with Masur was stressful partly because he saw his role in New York as that of a spiritual leader, harnessing the mystical side of his profession. This came out at disconcerting moments. Dicterow told me that, early in Masur's relationship with the orchestra, he conducted the beginning of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony simply by flinging out his arms, as if he were a munificent potentate hurling doubloons. The piece's first phrase is murderously difficult, because it starts with a rest (it's not *DA-da-da-DUM* but *GASP-da-da-da-DUM*), and because the pulse and the tension have to be established immediately. Dicterow approached Masur during a break and asked if the maestro might mark an extra beat, so the orchestra could figure out when to come in. Masur refused, insisting that the pulse would materialize on its own. "You must believe!" he pronounced. Astonishingly, Dicterow said, the gambit worked: Masur shot his arms out again, and the orchestra, ready and on edge, exploded. It's impossible to imagine Maazel taking that sort of chance.

One reason that conducting the Philharmonic is so difficult is that the orchestra members are as tetchy as they are gifted. Among the parade of guest conductors who took over the Philharmonic last fall was Mikko Franck, a Finn, who was only twenty-six at the time, and who conducted sitting down, because of back problems. His first rehearsal began with a Schnittke violin concerto. After a few run-throughs, a flutist asked him which of two possible ways she should play an irregular rhythm. He chose, and she answered testily that she hadn't been playing it that way before—hadn't he noticed? The remark was an unmistakable challenge to Franck's competence. "No, but that's how you'll do it now, right?" he answered, with a soft smile. The fumes dissipated, and he swept on. I have often heard it said that a guest has between two and five minutes in which to earn the musicians' respect.

Later, the Philharmonic's principal



"And you can rest assured that your problem is being ignored at the very highest levels."

cellist, Carter Brey, remarked that Franck had been so deft, so clear, and so authoritative that the issue of his age simply vanished. "The worst thing a young conductor can do is to get up in front of the New York Philharmonic and say what an honor it is to be here," Brey said. "Conductors have to project a very great self-assurance. We have an innate sense of how the piece should sound, we know how to make it sound natural, and we're ready at the drop of the hat to jump in and do that if the conductor loses control. There are conductors whom I've manipulated. I'll push a tempo or pull it back, if I feel there's no intensity coming from the podium. I don't have any patience with weak personalities."

IMAGINARY MENAGERIE

In the end, it was
as in the beginning: no one
learned anything. What was alive
was killed and posed,
stuffed, put on display. The remaining live
wandered around amongst the dead,
wondering what they looked like
when they were alive and in the positions
in which they were now posed, which the live
could have witnessed in life
had they not killed
the now
dead.

—*Barbara Tran*

The New World Symphony occupies a custard-colored Art Deco building in Miami Beach. Eighteen years ago, when Lincoln Road was still a dilapidated strip, Michael Tilson Thomas established the New World in a former movie palace, as a training orchestra for recent conservatory graduates. Now the orchestra is planning to trade up to a new home nearby, which will be designed by Frank Gehry. Tilson Thomas puts in several months a year here—roughly as much time as he spends with his main conducting job, as the leader of the San Francisco Symphony. No other orchestra in America is so identified with one man. Even his poodles, Banda and Shayna, trot around the New World's stage with a proprietary air.

The modern conductor's code of brevity—say just enough, but no more—doesn't appeal to Tilson Thomas, who likes to exercise his eloquence. At the New World, there are no union clock-watchers, and Tilson Thomas indulges his fondness for elaborate metaphors and long anecdotes. When I went to watch him in Miami, he was preparing a performance of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, a sprawling chronicle of the Battle of Leningrad. After the artillery-fired fury of the first movement, the second opens with a muted, shell-shocked waltz. To describe the shift in tone, Tilson Thomas intoned, "Meanwhile, in Madame Rupenskaya's dance studio . . ." The joke elicited a respectful chuckle. He then told his players a story about a Leningrad violinist who during the Second World War spent a night of bombing crouched in a toilet in the crumbling conservatory where he taught. A student went to check on him the next morning and the teacher greeted him joyfully: "I'm so glad to see you. I've just worked out the most wonderful fingerings for the Balakirev Sonata!"

Tilson Thomas went on, "So you see, even in the middle of terrible events people concentrate on very elegant things to preserve their sanity." He stopped talking and began to conduct, gently coaxing a ravaged, aristocratic lilt out of the players, who sat before him in cargo shorts and flip-flops.

After the rehearsal, we crossed the street to Cafeteria, an antiseptically chic restaurant throbbing with a synthesized soundtrack of Mahler's Fifth Symphony laid over a world beat. For years, Tilson Thomas had a reputation as a haughty and difficult colleague. But his tenures in Miami and San Francisco have been content, and marked by a sense of collective adventure. "My life changed when I finally accepted that I was not giving the performance—the *musicians* are," he said. "It's my purpose to help them shape, prioritize, and decide, so that at the concert they can be as spontaneous and engaged as possible. The more artistic the musicians are, the more you can work, not on the little details but on the larger things. I once saw Charlie Chaplin rehearse some actors, and he told one, 'Say that line as if *you* were saying it.' He understood—it has to be the other guy's performance." He continued, "In the past, most conductors modelled themselves on one type of authority figure or another. You had the generals, the professors, the high priests, and so on. For me, it's more like being a coach or a director."

Tilson Thomas describes an orchestral performance as a fluid exchange of ideas. The conductor establishes a tempo, a clarinettist bends it expressively for a solo, and the conductor takes over again, allowing an extra breath or two before bringing the other players back in. Everyone needs to be prepared, alert, and flexible. "There are some conductors who like to establish an exact template in rehearsal of what the performance is going to sound like," Tilson Thomas said. "Then the concert gets judged in terms of how good a reproduction it is. I don't work that way. I feel that if a soloist does something a little differently, I have to make that difference make sense, so the next event will need to be a little different, too."

Later that day, Alberto Suarez, a horn player in the New World Symphony, put it more succinctly: "A lot of conductors come in and they interpret the piece for you. But great conductors interpret the piece *with* you."

Tilson Thomas's collaborative ideal derives in part from contemporary management fashions. If Mengelberg and his peers saw themselves as high priests and Bernstein's generation aspired to be micromanaging auteurs, then many of today's music directors cultivate the khakis-and-shirtsleeves manner of a Silicon Valley C.E.O. In rehearsal, Tilson Thomas doesn't scream or threaten; he makes requests, not demands. He encourages orchestra members to call him by his first name, rather than "maestro." He makes allowances for musicians' moods and learns their children's names. Similarly, Spano—"Robert" to the Atlanta rank and file—spends most of his workdays in a faded blue polo shirt. James Levine oversees the Met and the Boston Symphony Orchestra in sweatpants.

Tilson Thomas has found that bringing democracy to the orchestral experience yields specific musical results. "There's a sense of spaciousness that's created using that technique," he told me. His open-ended interpretations with the San Francisco Symphony produce, at their best, a cinematic illusion, a vivid sense of location. I still remember a 1996 performance of Ives's "New England Holidays" Symphony, at Carnegie Hall, in which the musicians' separate cameos each had a distinct weight and gleam. In the "Washington's Birthday" movement, a percussionist playing chimes summoned distant church bells tolling across snowy fields. When the scene moved indoors, where polkas and waltzes collided in the rafters of a great dance hall, it was a violinist in the rear of the string section, and not the concertmaster, who played the solo, so that the fiddler sawing out old folk tunes seemed to be lurking in a dark corner. In Mahler symphonies, too, Tilson Thomas nurtures this sense of independence, as if his players were scattered on different peaks, communing across Alpine valleys. During a crystalline performance of Mahler's Fifth Symphony in San Francisco last fall, I had the feeling that Tilson Thomas's flamboyant physicality drew the players into his circle of experience and signalled his gratitude for the way they played.

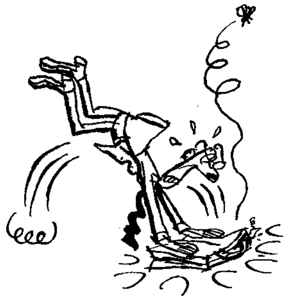
There is another reason that Tilson Thomas and his colleagues tend to be less dictatorial than conductors in the past: these days, it's easier to get rid of a music director than it is a rank-and-file violinist. As James Conlon told me, "You cannot be arbitrary in your dealing with the music or the players. You've got to govern by consent." Even the most respected and businesslike conductors can have trouble winning over a particular ensemble. When Marin Alsop, one of the few women to reach the top ranks of her profession, was appointed music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, in July of 2005, some of the musicians voiced a rare public complaint. (They were overruled.)

I asked Tilson Thomas what happens when a conductor and an orchestra fail to connect. The smile on his long, vulpine face hardened slightly. "It's amazing how mercurial, specific, and fragile the balance is in the human interactions in orchestras," he said at last. "So many things can change the way the feeling is. A lot of it has to do with how confident everyone is in the first place, how comfortable they are with the repertoire, with the acoustic, with one another. It has to do with exactly which players are there according to the rotation."

He went on, "The difference between a veteran conductor and someone inexperienced is that the veteran is able to hear more of what's going on. You're thinking about yourself less and the music more. But if you're nervous or disturbed by something nonmusical, if the conductor senses tension, if he's not sure the musicians approve of him, or if the musicians aren't sure they're being approved of, then the energy can dissipate."

As I listened to Tilson Thomas try to describe the way bad feelings can sabotage the music, I thought about what Clive Gillinson, the artistic director of Carnegie Hall, had said to me a few days earlier: "People forget what a lonely profession conducting is. You're up there by yourself and you don't have anyone to tell you, 'You're talking too much,' or 'You're not saying enough.' You have all these people looking at you. And you don't really know what they're thinking."

This February, Robert Spano came to New York to face a conductor's riskiest challenge: a world première. On four occasions, he led Dawn Upshaw and the New York Philharmonic in a performance of John Harbison's limpid "Milosz Songs," a setting of poems by Czeslaw Milosz, featuring delicate interludes by harp and celesta. On the afternoon of the final performance, Spano arrived at Avery Fisher Hall snuffling and exhausted. He spent most of lunchtime staring at a box of take-out sushi. I asked him how he felt about the new piece, now that he had drawn it off the page, after weeks of study, and into the physical world. "Right now, I'm totally committed to it," he answered. "Sometime in the next couple of weeks, I'll know how I feel about it." He added, "Our instinct is to react and form judgments very quickly, and with a new piece one's understanding will change over time." When I heard Harbison's work, it struck me as well wrought but overly polite; Spano's performance, however, had deftly highlighted its strongest quality—a kind of hushed prayerfulness.



I mentioned a couple of world premières that I sometimes fantasized about attending: Beethoven's Seventh; Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring." I wondered how clearly the first listeners and performers had perceived the violent originality of those works, or understood that they were hearing future classics.

"I have diminishing interest in posterity," Spano said. "I no longer feel that the test of the value of something is time. What's much more important is the power of a musical experience in a given moment. And that can happen with a Paganini violin piece that most of us agree shouldn't be called a masterpiece. I think of composers as setting up possibilities, not creating objects. There's no such thing as Beethoven's Seventh. It's only a hypothesis." Spano was silent for a while, then he said, "Pieces of music are wormholes, which we can enter to escape our normal experience of time."

Just then, a Philharmonic staffer came to call Spano to the stage for a sound check. He jumped to his feet, instantly energized. I recalled something he had told me earlier. "You have to invest in a piece's greatness," he said of Harbison's work. "As far as I'm concerned, it is a masterpiece until proven otherwise." Spano, grinning, hurried off to the podium, carrying a briefcase full of scores with him. ♦

FICTION

THE SPOT

BY DAVID MEANS

Jack Dunhill, a.k.a. Bone, a.k.a. the Bear, a.k.a. Stan Newhope, a.k.a. Winston Leonard, a.k.a. Michigan Pete, a.k.a. Bill Dempsey, a.k.a. Shank, said, Not those waves but that little pucker on the surface out there is where the Cleveland water supply is drawn in, right there, and if you were to dump enough poison on that spot you'd kill the entire city in one sweep. Believe me, I've thought it out. You'd just have to hit right there, he said, pointing again, and then he turned to examine her gaze, and in doing so presented his face, weathered from years of picking blueberries and cherries in Michigan, and, after that, a merchant-marine gig during Vietnam. You see, the water is unsuspecting until it hits that spot. It has no idea it's gonna be collected, drawn under the streets, cleaned up, and piped into homes. Not a clue. But when it touches that suck its future vanishes. No chance of becoming a wave after that, no kissing the shore and yearning back out into the lake. Instead, it ends up pooled on somebody's lawn, or slipping down a throat, or spooned into a bowl of baby cereal. That's the mystery of chance. One minute you're one thing, the next you're another, and choice had nothing at all to do with it. He paused, pointed one last time at the spot, shook himself free of his reverie, and pulled her close while she searched the water, tried to find the spot, and, failing to do so, said, I see it. I do. It's right where you said it would be.

. . . All this while killing time in Cleveland, waiting for the Mansfield john to show up to collect the girl, because against all odds he had sent payment in advance for an evening of pleasurable escort after succumbing to Shank's well-polished pitch:

The girl's name is Meg. Hell, name her whatever you want, but I'd like you to call her Meg when you greet her for the first time, my friend. Said girl being in the prime of her youth, fresh as a daisy and raring to go. She'd practically escort you for free if I weren't around to mediate her desires, my friend, he said from a phone booth outside Ypsilanti, watching the girl as she sat in the car, fixing her face in the mirror. The Mansfield john's number had come from a list of potential clients he'd been keeping, names and numbers whispered to him as he and Meg rambled aimlessly around the Great Lakes. OHIO MEN IN NEED, it said at the top in block lettering. Below were six names. He'd tried four of them already, with no luck, but this time he felt the guy taking the bait—a sense of urgency formed at the other end of the line as the Mansfield john succumbed to the image he had painted: a bright young girl entwined in a skein of sexual confusion, open to just about anything. A girl born out of the loins of Akron, smothered by a father's touch, and then cast out to fend for herself. (He'd left out the boring details: the way he had come upon her small body curled up, asleep, beneath an overpass outside Port Huron; the long journey they'd taken around the rim of the state of Michigan, following the mitten, staying as close as possible to the waterline. He'd left out her delicate neckline and the shallow hopelessness of her gaze and the way he'd educated her in how to make use of her flesh to earn funds. He'd left out his former religious training at the Grand Rapids Bible Institute and the way God had failed to give him a precise indication of His will.)

After that, he'd begun to zero in on a price, speaking to the image he had conjured of a somewhat dainty man in neat trousers, with the kind of studied, dreamy comportment you'd expect from a farmer who had gone into the seed business and left field work behind for good; there was a hint of yokel in the Mansfield john's voice, a bit of hick around his tongue tempered by churchgoing and Sunday-school teaching. Yes, there was most certainly some Bible study in the formality of his elocutions, and there was fear in the amplitude of his voice—just loud enough to sound natural. In the phone booth, Shank imagined Mansfield as a man with neat hair, parted clean on the left-hand side, held with a shellac of brilliantine, cut tight above the ears. His wife would be in the family room watching television, aware of her husband in the kitchen, maybe even listening in to his side of the conversation, which to her would seem naturally cryptic because he often made deals on the phone, talking about seed prices, the best hybrids to plant, the way to intercrop carrots with corn. With this in mind, Shank took care when the dickering began and told Mansfield, Just say soy if you're going to bid lower on Meg, and alfalfa if we hit the magic number. Eventually the john said, softly, Yes, alfalfa is the way to go because it's a versatile crop, alfalfa will do just fine in your soil if you're lucky with the weather, and Shank said, Good, we've got a deal and you'll be saving this little girl's life, Mansfield, you understand, because she's putting money away for college after being kicked out of her home for no good reason. Then he instructed the man where and when to meet, adding, Just give us a nod. You'll see us standing around outside the Holiday Inn, and then go on up and check in and I'll send her up to you. You'll know us when you see us. I'll be the one with the big shoulders, and she'll be the one with the sweet derrière.

Here we are, Shank thought (or maybe said) outside the hotel, waiting out yet another john delayed by his guilt and his doubts and the time it takes to check his morality at the door, driving north, praying for forgiveness, taking a rain check on his deeper principles while the dull fields fly eagerly past the bug-speckled windows. As Mansfield drives, alone in the car, his face will be composed—the same look he might have when teaching his Sunday-school class—as he reaches up once or twice to straighten his cuffs, or his tie, and assures himself that if he maintains a certain formality he'll be able to justify anything he might do in this good world. When he gets to the hotel, he'll be so enthralled by his own desire—acute, as solid as carved stone—that the rest of his life, the house and the business and his upstanding place in the community, will become nothing but a small white dot behind him, zipping away like the last of an old television image.

A bolo tie at his throat, fresh-pressed plaid shirt tucked smartly into his chinos, the john will unchain the door, let it swing open, throw his arms wide, and say, Come on in, Meg, offering up a room truncated and narrow, papered in gold foil, periscoping to a view of Lake Erie from fifteen stories up. She'll go directly to the window and stay there, with her back to him, as long as possible, looking out, trying to fashion some drama. From the violent johns she's learned that it's best to build up an assemblage of gestures, somewhat vaudevillian and slapstick, around

DETAIL: LANE CODER, "ANNA" (2006)

the act itself in order to preëmpt the hard, cold dynamics that otherwise set in naturally. (She would've got that from her father, an old tool-and-die guy: an awareness of the importance of the fine gradients, of using a micrometer, measure twice, cut once, and all that. . . .) Most johns were as hard as tungsten, as square inside as an unworked block. Behind her, Mansfield will cough a couple of times, unhitch his belt, and then approach her hesitantly. Beneath his façade of neat and upstanding morals will be a horrible goatlike presence, a humping energy that will arrive musky and damp, pressing up against her, moaning, reaching around to tweak her breasts. That much is certain. This john's a connoisseur of dry, Shank had warned her. He likes it sandpapery and rough, no lubrication, none, nada.

As Shank waited for her down in the hotel lobby, he began to feel himself edging into pure speculation. He knew little about what really went on up in the room, but he had a basic idea and he could imagine, in general terms, how she coped. Most likely she'd:

1) Find a crass rigidity, all bone and sinew, in the brashness of survival.

2) Abolish the formality of her own flesh. Reduce herself down to an essence—hips, the arch of her foot and shoulder blades, the part in her hair, the fine down on her earlobes, the nape of her neck.

3) Assume a protoplasmic mobility; the creep of the protozoa, one-celled hydra, primal and original and eager to consume itself for lunch.

In due course, Mansfield will tell her that he sells seed and some heavy equipment wholesale, just outside of town proper, and then he'll let his pants fall to the floor, step out of them, and move behind her as he places his cold, bloodless hands around her belly and tries to turn her while she resists slightly, and then some more, until he has to use a little force, and then they'll do a give-and-take shuffle to the bed, where he'll push her down and take her clothing off a bit at a time until finally they'll be doing it, and then he'll completely embody that goatlike carnality, grunting and groaning, while she keeps her eyes closed and concentrates on the spot Shank had pointed out to her on the water earlier, and she'll think about how it would feel to be devoured by darkness and then spat out somewhere, startled and renewed, fresh and tight from a spigot into a bucket or out onto a lush lawn somewhere pleasant—yes, she'll use that image, hold to it, and it will make things easier for her, he thought down in the lobby, waiting for her to emerge from the elevator, which she did, about forty-five minutes later, raising her hand to adjust her hair, glancing around for him with a bit too much eagerness.

There was something in her face: a slackness in her jaw that foretold the confession she'd give an hour later, driving through the moonlit suburb of Lakewood, speaking softly, saying: He had that string tie on the whole time, and it kept bugging me. You know, those cold metal tips kept brushing me, and it was like they were saying, Here I am, yank me. We're ready to go. Just grab hold. Cross the line, he said. Not out loud, but with his hands and his you-know-what. I said no. He struck me and said, Cross it. I said no. He hit me again. Then those strings told me: Draw me tight. And so I did. I did. It took all my might. I dug a knee into his ribs, tightened the bolo tie around his throat, and rode him like a bronco until he stopped moving, she said.

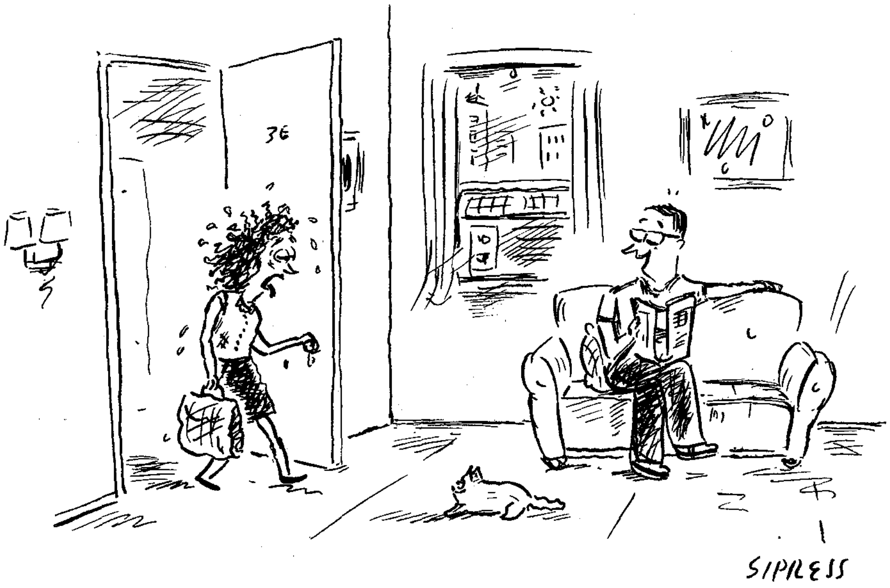
Shank could just barely make out the shape of her face in the pale Ohio light. Go on. Go on, he said, and she said, Well, what do you want to hear? Give me the nitty-gritty, he said. Give me the sick parts that this country ain't ready for, the bits folks would never believe. He waited, listening to the engine shudder. Well, she said, his teeth popped out during the fight. His bridge, I guess you'd call it, the four front ones, and when I was done I popped them into my mouth and said, What's up, doc? You didn't, he said, feeling the laugh come up from his ribs and then listening as she laughed in response.

Eventually they were up on the beach road, passing sensible homes, locked tight and frowning out at the lake with mute but unshaded windows while the first light came along the edge of the lake and he explained to her how even Erie would ignite if you touched a match to it correctly, and then he rambled on (trying to stop himself at first) about the time he'd witnessed the Cuyahoga River burn, a calico blanket of shimmering flames elbowing its way into the heart of Cleveland, and how the sight of it had changed everything and made him aware that his calling wasn't with the Lord, because there hadn't been a single recognizable sign of prophesy in that water, even as it burned.

After a swing up to Detroit for no good reason except to pay off a gambling debt and to cast a glance at Lake St. Clair, they headed east along the dreary tedium of Canada, Highway 401, the staggering dull flatness and repetition. This part of Canada's nothing but a feeble reflection of U.S. glory, he said. Then he carried on about old draft-dodger buddies who'd gone nuts from missing the American stuff. Guys who hallucinated burger joints, strip clubs, and billboards behind their eyelids. I avoided that. I skirted that issue, he said. I went into the merchant marine to get around running to Canada, and I got around it easy while my buddies went over and came back fucked up, or dead. Do I feel the guilt that comes from that? I certainly do. Do I live each day pondering it? I certainly do. Do I lament the way history chewed my best buddies up? I certainly do. Do I wonder at the great forlorn gravity of the way things went in the past? I most certainly do. Do I spend my days in a state of total lament? I certainly do. Do I tell the same old threadbare stories over and over as a way to placate the pain that is stuck between my rib bones? I do indeed. Am I just another lost sixties soul who dropped one tab too many and can't extricate myself from a high? I certainly am. And then, from that point, he kept talking, unable to help himself, until his discourse expanded (while she dozed and slept fitfully, rising from her dreams to catch fragments of his voice) and he fell into a reverie and told a long story as he drove, keeping close to the speed limit because the Mounties were out, their hats aslant. Here's the story, verbatim, as he told it:

There was this guy named Ham. This was just after my buddy Billy-T came back from his first tour of duty. You had to surmise Ham's story, because otherwise he was pretty much a blank slate. A big guy, the son of a pipe fitter from the Upper Peninsula, he was living in that shantytown I told you about, the old hobo hangout near the Kalamazoo River, a spot beneath the railroad tracks, not far from a gravel pit. Anyway, Ham had this wigwam setup, an assemblage of old sheet iron, tar paper, birch bark, leather, nylon, deer hides, and bearskins laid over the original Potawatomi wigwam frame, arched branches twined with petrified deer hide, and the old smoke hole, too—and there was another shack, which had originally been a sweat lodge or something. You went in and smoked some hash and listened for the spirits to call. And they did call, man. Those spirits came in all forms and sizes and said things you'd never forget, at least not for a while.

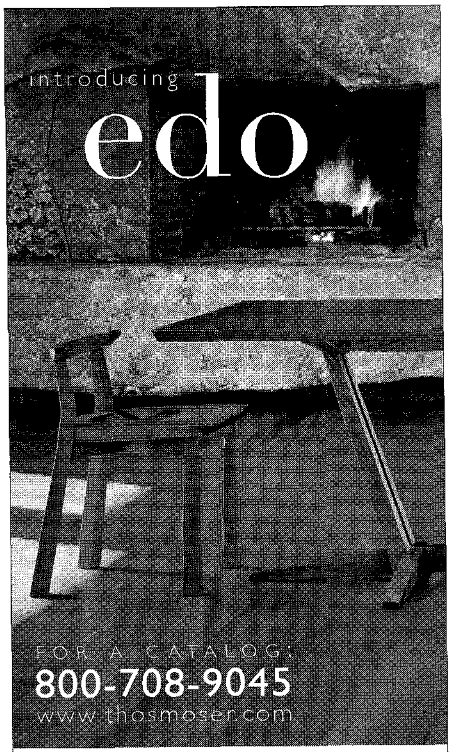
Anyway, Ham had this girl, Maggie, a street kid from Detroit, a real looker, with those baby blues, bright blond hair, and a lispy little pair of lips that had trouble around polysyllabic words. Naturally, I took a shine to her, but she was Ham's, and you couldn't so much as look her way without getting him on your case. I snuck a glance anyhow, when I could. One day, I took her by the hand and led her down to the river and told her I'd baptize her right there if she wanted, and she said she did, go on, do it to me, make me clean or whatever. My study at the Bible institute was a year or so behind me then, but the words were still around, and I could still utter them in a convincing way. Full immersion, I told her. The works. Right down to an evocation of the Holy Spirit, which would pass into her soul, and so on and so forth, and her soul flying upward, skyward, I said, and so on and so forth. I admit, I laid it on thick, talking about the purity of her heart this, and the salvation of the soul that, and so on and so forth, and she listened to me attentively while her hands, tiny things, fluttered like hummingbirds sipping from her ears. Even now, when I think about it, I can imagine them fluttering on my shoulders and breastbone. (Here he lifted his hands from the steering wheel and waved his fingers.) Anyway, the Kalamazoo was one of the most polluted rivers in the world at the time. You could've walked across it if you'd had the will to do so. That sounds like an exaggeration, I know, but it was loaded with pulp waste from the paper mills, along with whatever Checker Cab felt like adding to the mix. In any case, I led her through the bush to the shore and we stood there looking at the water. This was early evening, or maybe dawn, or maybe early afternoon, late fall, perhaps, but a warm day for sure. The sky tried to reflect itself in the water but failed. Clouds and trees fell against the surface and were lost forever. The fish in the Kalamazoo begged for the hook. You'd flip them onto the shore and they'd flex their gills as a way of saying thanks. A few hardy bugs stalked the surface, yanking their gummy feet. You'll do better, I mean gracewise, without those garments, I told her.



"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"

Meanwhile, during all of this, Ham was in his wigwam, sleeping. He slept like a mule. You could hear his snores all the way down to the shore. At least I thought you could. I knew he'd eventually get up, find her gone, and start looking. I knew he'd come down the trail noisily, heaving from side to side, unsteady on his feet, coughing and wheezing, because he was a grizzly of a man, and he snorted and snuffled even when he was still. You wanted to give him fair warning if you came up to him from behind. One was inclined to wear a bear bell around the guy.

Anyway, in her full, naked glory there was a shame in her that made her put her hands up, and then down, and then up. I said, I'm going to hold you under and speak the words, and you'll be down there in the depths, where it's dark and dreary, amid the detritus and waste for a moment, and you'll panic, most likely, feeling my hand here, I said, putting my hand on the back of her head. But you must resist the panic because I'll keep you under just as long as it takes me to say the words. Then I'll release you and you'll come up sputtering into newborn light brighter than anything you've seen before. And she said, I'm right for it, I'm in need, I've got blemishes that must be washed away, and I said, Good, good, you're ready. But one more thing. When you see that newborn light, take a long look before it fades when your eyes adjust. You only get a glimpse before it goes away, and then you have to rely on memory, and if your memory isn't strong you'll lose your grip on salvation. Then I took her into the water and started, pushing her under, and at some point I heard Ham on his way down, heaving through the brush. He must've seen me through the trees. What did he see? A



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man gripping his girl's head, holding her down while she wiggled with the Holy Spirit, splashing a froth into the air. Naturally, from his vantage, he misconstrued my actions and became wild with rage, dancing his way bowlegged through the brambles, held back only by his fear of water. Ham's terror of water was incredible. He could hardly find it in himself to splash his own face from the tap. He found brushing his teeth impossible. You could see his fear in the way he came in up to his toes and then backed out quickly. There were huge forces at play. He'd gone up against them as far as he could, and then he drew a line. He cursed the water, the river, and then yours truly. Against this backdrop, I tried to keep to the task at hand, and if anyone's to blame for my failings, for holding her under a beat too long, it's Ham himself for proving such a distraction. Timing is everything when it comes to the work of baptism. One wrong move and God enters the world at a weird angle. Take my word for it. I kept to the task at hand. After I released her body to the currents, Ham raced along the shore. I can't account for her spirit, but her body swung in wide windmill loops as it was drawn downstream, just out of Ham's reach. For a moment he stood still, quivering in a force field between his rage toward me and his lust for her. Lust won the prize, and he moved downstream, trying to lure her in with the end of a branch. But the currents were too strong.

Long story short, I went back to Ham's wigwam and sacked his food. Long story short, I ate his food while he followed her body all the way to Lake Michigan, where he stood on the shore and rolled his shoulders, as if bracing for a fight. He stood on the shore and bellowed. He was a grand, operatic bellower. His voice spiralled out over the water, as if blown from a conch shell. A big fat bellow that came five miles up the river to his wigwam, where by the time the sound got to me it was weak and feeble but still as clear as day. I sat, held off on my chewing as long as I could, and listened, clenching my teeth against the ringing in my ears, and the soft breeze that was coming through the leaves as evening approached. I was happy, because when the evening light met the Kalamazoo it did so on equal terms, and then for a while, until night fell and it was too dark to see, the river looked clean and even drinkable, Meg, as pure as anything you've seen in the world up until now.

He talked and then fell silent and then talked some more, until a few hours later they were in Niagara Falls and he nudged her awake so she could see the mist plume over the horizon. Then they drove along the river and up to the observation station and got out to stretch their legs. That river goes the wrong fucking way, it goes north instead of south, he explained, taking her hand. Then he climbed onto the fence and sat, patting the wooden railing. It goes against the grain of gravity heading that way, Meg. And it did. To their right the Niagara's water tore along the bank, groped hard, forming small eddies in which leaves and bits of trash pooled. To their left all fury and wonder until the river got close to the edge and then grew smooth and calm, thin with hesitation. You'll be able to walk out there if you're careful enough and stick with the harder surface near the edge, he said, and if I tell you to do it, you'll do it, won't you? You'll step right out there on your beautiful little feet when I give you the command, and you'll be just fine.

One more textbook case of discard and loss, another suicide fished out of the waters. Bodies were pushed to the bottom initially—for a few minutes—and then, unless snagged on the rocks below, they bobbed up and twirled around, unable to catch the outflow, which made it easy for the man named Kit Wilson, who took his Zodiac out with the collecting nets, to catch hold of her body and draw it up against the hull. Another slipper, he thought. Another foolish tourist who got too close. Another drunkard unable to resist the lure of danger. Another kid who went in too deep and couldn't get out of the rage. Another American testing the edge. (Canadians rarely went over.) Another girl skinny-dipping with her boyfriend, swimming too far out into the tangle of currents, taking the long trip down with plenty of time to think over her life and to consider the mistakes she'd made in one form or another. Maybe she simply couldn't live up to the expectations that life had, and decided that this was the best way to go, majestic and grand, united with the great drive of the water that had been coming over this escarpment for a million years (with the exception of that wonderful time, years ago, when just a trickle came over the scarred jawbone of rock while the rest of the mighty river was surprised to find itself diverted through the power-plant intake pipes). It seemed that at least once a year the same girl came over the falls to give him a bit role in the large drama that would culminate when the news crews showed up and asked him to speak. His Canuck voice would be clear and exact: We don't know where she came from. No idea why she did it. The falls aren't something to fool with. And, No, I don't get used to pulling them out like this.

He fished her out and saw that she was maybe fourteen or fifteen, with a thin, malformed rump, tiny arms, and a bruised face, cut along her brow, from which stared a pair of mute blue eyes. Her lips were pulled back in a grimace, exposing a gap between her two front teeth. Looking down at the body, flexing along with the hull, he got a hint of her story. (Later he'd hear her name, Meg Allen, and learn that her history could be traced back as far as a hotel in Cleveland, where she had murdered a seed dealer from a place called Mansfield, and then a bit farther back, to a hell-on-earth childhood in Akron.) Whatever produced these bodies with regularity would go on, he thought. If there was a way to stop it, it had been forgotten long ago. He held the tiller and got the motor going full throttle and watched as the wake dug surprisingly straight and clean out of the torment. He loved the feel of the boat when its stern cut deep and, in turn, the bow lifted toward the sky, slapping over the waves. He loved the way the wake spread itself out—even in the foam and rage—and how, when he was past the wash-up, as they called it, the water gathered itself into order and smoothed quickly, as if eager to be done with all the noise and to get back to a more settled existence on the way down to the whirlpool, where it would spin mindlessly for a few minutes before being released into the relative calm of the river as it headed toward the merciful breadth of Lake Ontario. ♦

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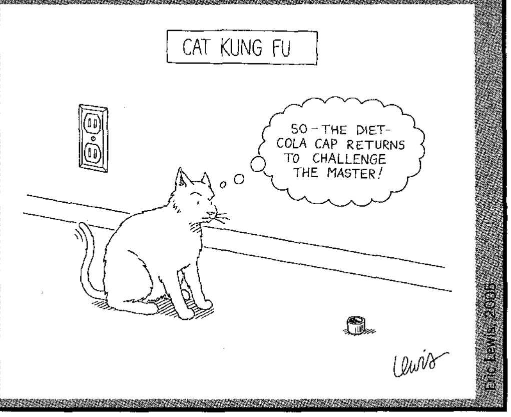
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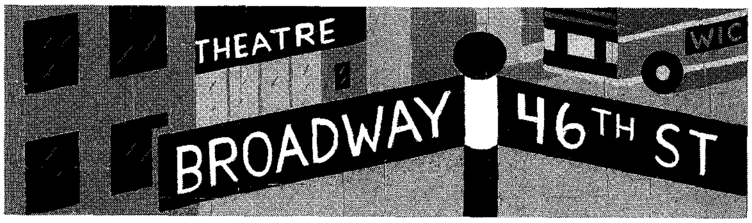


THE CURRENT CINEMA

ON DUTY

"World Trade Center."

BY DAVID DENBY

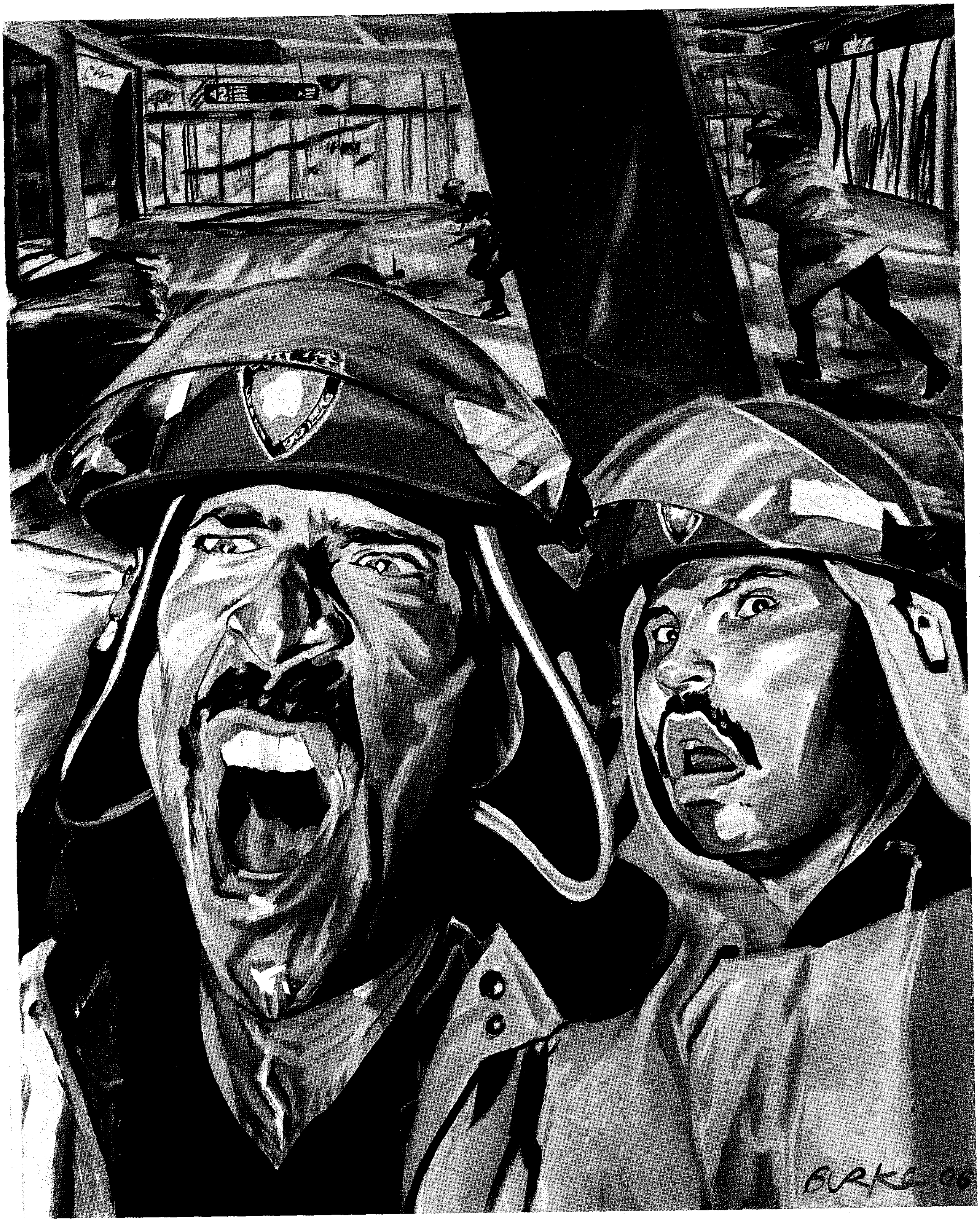
The Port Authority cops in Oliver Stone's "World Trade Center" emerge at first light from their houses in Clifton, New Jersey, and Goshen, New York, and head for the city. As other officers make their way into town from Staten Island and Brooklyn, Stone gives us lovely shots of empty Manhattan streets at dawn—the episode is like the quiet orchestral prelude to an epic opera. We get the point of the anticipatory opening: the incomparable urban island couldn't flourish as it does without the talent and the labor of the communities pouring into it. Then comes a surprise: the men in "World Trade Center" leave their families behind, but the movie does not. As the catastrophe of September 11, 2001, unfolds, and the police encounter serious trouble downtown, their wives, children, parents, and friends, stranded at home without news, turn out to be just as tough as the men are. "World Trade Center" is about courage and endurance as a function of family strength; it's about suburban and small-town America trying to save the big city. Those are conservative themes, much praised for their appearance in this movie by the kind of right-wingers who have long hated Oliver Stone. Some of the euphoria—Cal Thomas, a columnist and a commentator at Fox News, calls the movie "one of the greatest pro-American, pro-family, pro-faith, pro-male, flag-waving God Bless America films you will ever see"—is not only inane, it's enough to turn you off moviegoing altogether. Can "World Trade Center" really be that bad? No, the ideologues laying hands on the movie won't sink it. Stone bulls his way into our emotions with his usual force but with greater clarity, sanity, and measure than in the past, and he is better at violent spectacle and at capturing the stages of dying than any other director. This square movie, at its best, is very powerful.

In some ways, "World Trade Center" is an odd memorial to heroism. The men, it turns out, don't rescue anyone—instead, they require rescue themselves. Ordered into action from their post at the Port Authority terminal, they commandeer a city bus and race downtown in a state of almost complete ignorance of what has happened, advancing into a hallucinatory storm of paper drifting out of the Twin Towers. Stone avoids the obvious moments—the planes hitting the buildings. He's interested not in the attack itself but in the response to it, and he doesn't exaggerate or hype anything. When reality itself has been dislocated, just getting the details right is enough to re-create an overwhelming and oppressive strangeness. There is a fine shot, in slow motion, that passes across the astonished faces of the policemen in the bus as they see a middle-aged man who has expired in the street. Has he had a heart attack? Or been hit by something? At the site, Sergeant John McLoughlin (Nicolas Cage) calls for volunteers, and four men step forward, including the rookie Will Jimeno (Michael Peña). They enter the complex and turn into the concourse between the towers. Like shades in the netherworld, wounded and dazed people walk past them in a slow procession. Odd and terrifying thumps and crashes can be heard from overhead—and then the first tower begins to collapse. Up to this point, Stone keeps everything moving along vividly. Then, suddenly, after the collapse, the screen goes still and dark. McLoughlin and Jimeno lie pinned in rubble, with only a little light shining from far above. They could be two boys who have fallen down a well. Fifteen years apart in age, they barely know each other, and the central issue of the movie becomes: what exactly do you need from another man and from your own mind in order to stay alive?

After a noisy beginning as a screenwriter ("Midnight Express," "Scarface," "Conan the Barbarian") and an uncertain turn or two as a director ("Seizure," "The Hand"), Oliver Stone found his voice, in 1986, with "Salvador," starring James Woods as the real-life hustling journalist Richard Boyle. The movie was set in El Salvador, during the years of the military junta and the death squads. Boyle, enjoying the chaos, jokes and scams his way through one scary situation after another but gradually becomes outraged by America's complicity in the war. Hair-trigger crazy, "Salvador" was pitched at a level of manic humor that was startling at the time; the picture remains meaner and funnier than anything coming out today. Back in 1971, Stone had been a student of Martin Scorsese's, at N.Y.U., and he was clearly influenced by Scorsese's operatic realism, which he took in a surprising direction of his own. For all the rough talk and messy action in "Salvador," Stone was as earnest as any collar-grabbing country preacher: he wanted Americans to confront the country's sins. The conservatives who began to attack him after "Salvador" had him all wrong. Stone was not some anti-American crank but an anguished patriot with an outsized capacity for anger and shame.

He had, after all, dropped out of Yale and, in 1967, joined the Army, volunteering for active duty in Vietnam, where he fought with the 25th Infantry Division near the Cambodian border, and earned a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. Stone re-created some of that experience in the Oscar-winning "Platoon" (1986), a movie notable for the tactile and visceral terror of its jungle-combat scenes, the profane strength of the men's speech, and the fa-

PHILIP BURKE



Nicolas Cage and Michael Peña as Port Authority policemen in Oliver Stone's movie about September 11, 2001.

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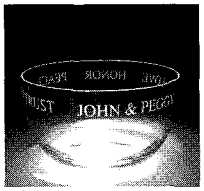

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mous episode set in a village under Vietcong domination, in which the soldiers lose control and become murderers. Guilt over crimes committed in Vietnam tormented the wheelchair-bound veteran Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise) in Stone's "Born on the Fourth of July" (1989), a furious and at times excruciating lament for the betrayal of American ideals. In his spooky "JFK" (1991), that sense of betrayal morphed into intimations of dark conspiracy. Through good movies and bad, including "The Doors" (1991), "Natural Born Killers" (1994), "Nixon" (1995), and "Any Given Sunday" (1999), Stone seemed permanently at war and stuck in the jittery, drug-charged mood of the nineteen-sixties and early seventies. Like his protagonist Boyle, he worked out at the emotional edge, and sometimes went over it. In "Born on the Fourth of July," Tom Cruise and Willem Dafoe, playing another paraplegic vet, get into a brutal fight on a deserted Mexican road; the brawl may have been intentionally absurd, but only Stone could have contrived this nutty emblem of futility. As a filmmaker, he was drawn to intellectual and political melodrama and to convulsive emotional climaxes that depended on wrenching the audience from one context to another.

"World Trade Center" is also a kind of war film, but this time the home front is as powerfully realized as the battle zone. The project was originated by the late producer Debra Hill and written by Andrea Berloff (it's her first produced screenplay), and the two women seem to have convinced Stone that his past portrayals of female characters—Madonnas, whores, and victims—would no longer do. Donna McLoughlin is a woman with four children and a policeman husband, and Maria Bello, with an aggressive, head-up stance and a steady gaze, plays her as a cool-headed battler. Will Jimeno's pregnant wife, Allison (Maggie Gyllenhaal), is younger, more volatile, more demanding. Gyllenhaal is a good actress who doesn't look like a movie star—her carriage is relaxed, her smile a little lopsided. She takes on this impatient, lower-middle-class woman of Italian descent without a trace of condescension. As bits of news—some accurate, some not—reach the families, the home scenes play at a high level of tension, but without Stone's old hammer-headed emphasis. Again, plain statement is enough.

Disaster has been a prime subject for art at least since the Iliad, but many people would prefer that their raw memories of 9/11 were never sullied by representation. Others are willing to accept art of a particular sort, one grounded in observation and sympathy. "United 93," Paul Greengrass's brilliant movie about that downed flight, released in April, was almost austere in its use of anonymous actors and limited-point-of-view shooting. Stone's movie is more direct emotionally, but he simplifies, too. With gentle transitions rather than the usual peremptory jerk, he cuts back and forth between the two men and their homes. Trapped at different levels in the mashed steel and concrete, maybe twenty feet apart, they provide each other with whatever support they are capable of, and their halting communion—talk about wives and children and religious faith—is often moving. The hyperactive Nicolas Cage, immobile for once, struggling for breath, quietly speaks the beautiful fragments that Berloff has written for McLoughlin as he slips in and out of consciousness. It is perhaps the finest acting of Cage's career.

There's only one element in the movie that feels too stiff. A slab-faced ex-marine, Dave Karnes (Michael Shannon), an accountant who lives in Connecticut, hears God's call on the morning of the attack, dons his old uniform, and moves into the smoking ruins after the official rescue teams have been called off for the night. Stone's iconic treatment of Karnes could have used a touch of humor—like many inspired men, he seems a bit mad. But Karnes, solemn and remote as he is, may be important to Stone in ways that go deep. The vets in "Born on the Fourth of July" longed for home and for "things that made sense, things you could count on, before we got so lost." The world may not make sense anymore, but Oliver Stone, a warrior still, celebrating courage and endurance, has, in his own way, come home. ♦

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From the Macon (Ga.) Telegraph.

"A restraining order at this point would throw a monkey wrench in the whole procedural apple cart that has already left the station," said lawyer Marc Cohen, arguing on behalf of the state.

BOOKS

THE PHILOSOPHER STONED

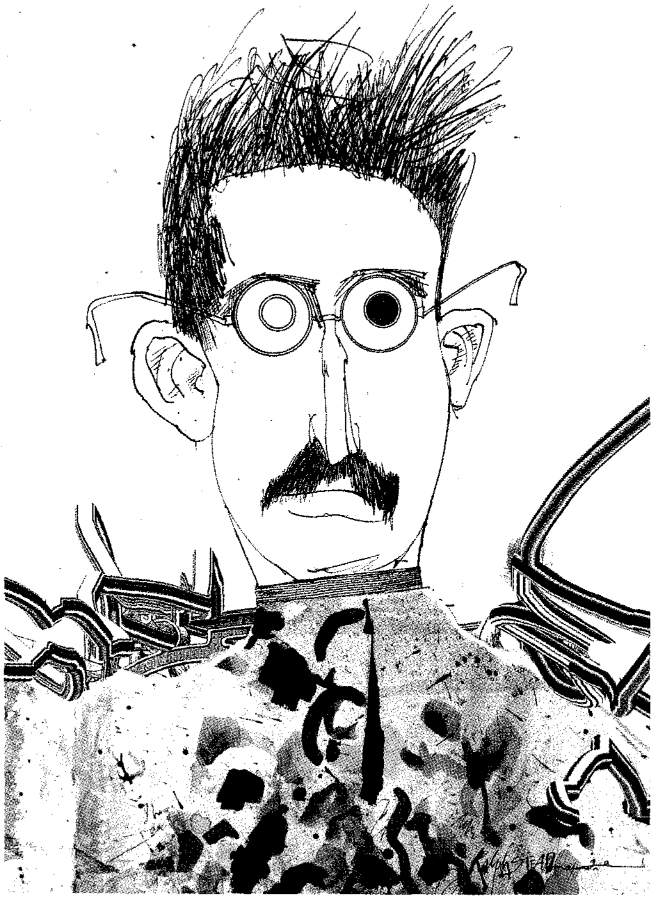
What drugs taught Walter Benjamin.

BY ADAM KIRSCH

On December 18, 1927, at three-thirty in the morning, Walter Benjamin began writing a memorandum titled "Main Features of My First Impression of Hashish." It is characteristic of Benjamin that the first fact he thought it necessary to record was not the time he had taken the drug but the time he started writing about it. Like the books he read and the streets he wandered—like life itself—hashish was important to him less for its own sake than as a subject for interpretation.

For a writer with Benjamin's interests and allegiances, a rendezvous with hashish was inevitable. The surprising thing is that it took him until the age of thirty-five to try it. As early as 1919, he had been fascinated by Baudelaire's "Artificial Paradises," in which the poet issues warnings against the drug so seductive that they sound like invitations: "You know that hashish always evokes magnificent constructions of light, glorious and splendid visions, cascades of liquid gold." Benjamin, who regarded Baudelaire as one of the central writers of the nineteenth century, admired the book's "childlike innocence and purity," but was disappointed in its lack of philosophical rigor, noting, "It will be necessary to repeat this attempt independently." The notes from his first hashish trance show him holding deliberately aloof from any kind of rapture. "The gates to a world of grotesquerie seem to be opening," he wrote. "Only, I don't wish to enter." According to Jean Selz, a friend with whom Benjamin smoked opium on several occasions, "Benjamin was a smoker who refused the initial blandishments of the smoke. He didn't want to yield to it too readily, for fear of weakening his powers of observation."

Over the next seven years, Benjamin participated in drug sessions as either subject or observer at least nine times, but his attitude toward drugs remained vigilantly experimental. He seldom took them when he was alone, and he never had his own supplier, relying on doctor friends to procure hashish, opium, and, on one occasion, mescaline. The sessions were recorded in "protocols," furnishing raw material for what Benjamin intended to be a major book on the philosophical and psychological implications of drug use. When, in a letter to Gershom Scholem, his best friend from the age of twenty-three, Benjamin, then forty, listed four unwritten books that he considered "large-scale defeats"—evidence of the "ruin or catastrophe" that his career had become—the last was a "truly exceptional book about hashish."



For Benjamin, the whole world was material for criticism.

RALPH STEADMAN

Nearly three-quarters of a century later, a book by Walter Benjamin called "On Hashish" has finally appeared in English, along with another long-gestated work, "Berlin Childhood Around 1900" (Harvard; $14.95 each). "On Hashish" is not, however, the "truly exceptional book" he had in mind; it's a miscellany, gathering the protocols of his drug experiments, two published accounts of his experiences, and a handful of references to drugs culled from his other works. It can only begin to suggest the true importance of drug experiences for the development of Benjamin's thought.

Yet for this very reason "On Hashish" stands in the same relation to a more conventional essay on drugs as Benjamin's literary essays do to conventional criticism. "You hardly feel that you have been reading criticism," Frank Kermode noted when "Illuminations," the first English-language selection of Benjamin's writings, appeared, in 1968. "It requires the kind of response we are accustomed to give to works of art." "Illuminations" revealed just a few peaks from the sunken continent of Benjamin's work, but these were enough to establish him as a central figure in the history of modernism. Benjamin approached every genre as a kind of laboratory for his lifelong investigations into language, philosophy, and art, and his ideas on these subjects are so original, and so radical in their implications, that they remain profoundly challenging today, more than sixty-five years after his death.

The period of Benjamin's adulthood and achievement was 1914 to 1940, the darkest in modern European history, and, if no one ever wrote criticism the way he did, it is because no other critic felt the dislocations of the time so severely. Benjamin was born in Berlin in 1892, into a prosperous Jewish family, and his expectations were formed in the halcyon period before 1914. In "A Berlin Chronicle," a series of newspaper articles that make up the nucleus of "Berlin Childhood Around 1900," he remembered the feeling of bourgeois security that suffused the very furniture in his family's apartment:

> Here reigned a species of things that was, no matter how compliantly it bowed to the minor whims of fashion, in the main so wholly convinced of itself and its permanence that it took no account of wear, inheritance, or moves, remaining forever equally near to and far from its ending, which seemed the ending of all things.

In such a home, poverty was unimaginable: "The poor? For rich children of his generation, they lived at the back of beyond."

In time-honored fashion, Benjamin hoped to abandon the commercial milieu of his father, a successful antiques dealer, for a more prestigious career as an academic. By the time the First World War began, he was already committed to a life of scholarship and, as an opponent of the war, felt no qualms about maneuvering to get out of military service. The best source for Benjamin's life in these years, Gershom Scholem's moving yet unsentimental memoir, "Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship," records that the two of them stayed up the whole night before Benjamin's draft-board medical exam, "while Benjamin consumed vast quantities of black coffee, a practice then followed by many young men prior to their military physicals." The trick, calculated to simulate a weak heart, worked, and Benjamin was able to spend the rest of the war in Switzerland, studying for his doctorate at the University of Bern.

Scholem shared Benjamin's academic ambitions and his antiwar convictions, and their student friendship laid the groundwork for a lifetime of intellectual debate, most of which was to take place by mail. The most important issue between them, from the beginning, was Judaism, and the possibility of being a Jewish intellectual in Germany. For Scholem, an ardent Zionist who was expelled from his assimilated family for his views, the history of Jewish mysticism gradually displaced mathematics and philosophy as a focus of study. For Benjamin, however, Judaism remained more a possibility to be imagined than a life to be lived. He never mastered its religious practices or sacred texts, and, as he acknowledged to Scholem, "I have come to know living Judaism in absolutely no form other than you."

The friends' divergent attitudes toward Jewishness largely determined their subsequent careers. Neither of them entered the German university life for which they had trained. In 1923, Scholem, changing his first name from the German Gerhard to the Hebrew Gershom, emigrated to Palestine, where there was no university; he planned to support himself as a schoolteacher. As fate would have it, when the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was founded, shortly afterward, he was named one of the first professors, and by the time of his death, in 1982, he had become known as the greatest modern scholar of Jewish mysticism. Benjamin, who remained closer to home, ended up straying much farther from his early academic path. Having taken his doctorate in 1919, he enrolled at the University of Frankfurt to write his *Habilitationsschrift*, the second dissertation required for teaching in a German university. But even as he was researching the thesis, which became "The Origin of German Tragic Drama," Benjamin suspected that it would never be approved by the tradition-bound faculty. The thesis, less a historical treatise than a philosophical meditation on the nature of allegory, was, he bragged to Scholem, "unmitigated chutzpah." Even worse than the possibility of being rejected, however, was the possibility of being accepted. In February, 1925, as he prepared to submit the dissertation, Benjamin admitted, "I dread almost everything that would result from a positive resolution to all of this: I dread Frankfurt above all, then lectures, students, etc."

He needn't have worried. Although the dissertation contains some of his most radical insights into language and literature, his examiners rejected it, admitting that they couldn't understand a single page. In the mid-nineteen-twenties, then, his career took a sharp turn. With his parents increasingly unwilling or unable to support him, he began to earn a living as a freelance literary journalist, contributing to the culture sections of newspapers and magazines.

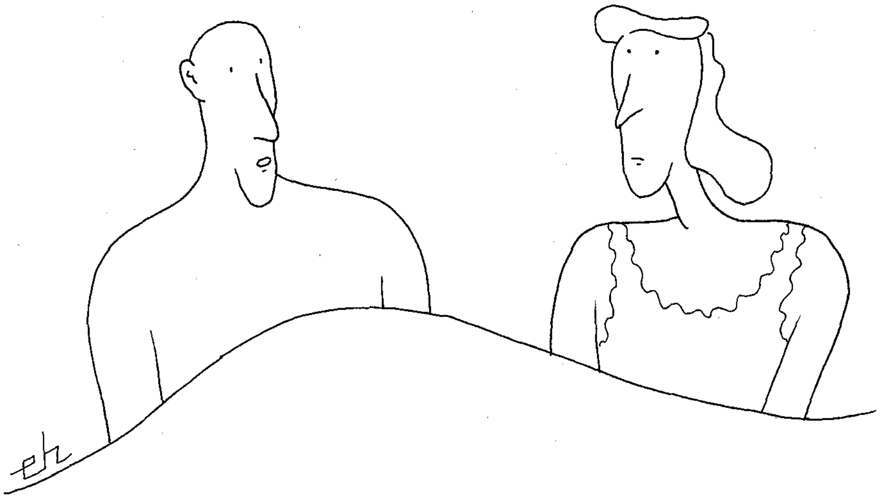
The death of Benjamin the academic philosopher meant the birth of Benjamin the cultural critic. Harvard University Press's monumental, four-volume edition of "Selected Writings" (from which the texts of the two new books have, for the most part, been taken) allows the reader to chart Benjamin's change of direction and his increasing productivity, as he began to cater to the demands of the literary market. All of his writing from 1913 to 1926 fits into the first volume, which is dominated by unpublished essays on abstract topics. His first major piece of literary criticism, a long essay on Goethe's novel "Elective Affinities," was not published until 1925. But from the mid-nineteen-twenties onward he became more and more prolific. The Harvard edition's second volume covers the seven years from 1927 to 1934, and two volumes are required for his last six years.

Much of Benjamin's early writing, though always stamped with his oblique intelligence, is the small change of journalism: travel pieces, book reviews, an article on the Berlin Food Exhibition of 1928. In addition to giving Benjamin a precarious living, such work helped him adapt his extremely dense style, formed in the harsh school of German idealist philosophy, into a more appealing literary instrument. Even so, his prose remained challenging. A friend once told him, "In great writing, the proportion between the total number of sentences and those sentences whose formulation was especially striking or pregnant was about one to thirty—whereas it was more like one to two in [your] case." ("All this is correct," Benjamin admitted.)

Benjamin's roundabout methods can be seen in his best-known literary essays, the examinations of Proust, Baudelaire, and Kafka published in "Illuminations." These contain little of what we ordinarily expect from criticism: biographical background, information about plot and character, literary-historical comparisons. Instead, Benjamin presents his subjects enigmatically, using startling metaphors and emblems. His essay on Proust (whose works he helped translate into German) is called "The Image of

Proust," and draws an implicit parallel between the novelist's method and the critic's, presenting Proust as a collector of charged images, momentary glimpses that open up passages to the buried life. "The image detaches itself from the structure of Proust's sentences as that summer day at Balbec—old, immemorial, mummified—emerged from the lace curtains under Françoise's hands," Benjamin writes. And he responds in kind, concluding his essay with the image of Proust lying in bed, his asthmatic prostration converted into heroic labor:

> For the second time there rose a scaffold like Michelangelo's on which the artist, his head thrown back, painted the Creation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel: the sickbed on which Marcel Proust consecrates the countless pages which he covered with his handwriting, holding them up in the air, to the creation of his microcosm.



"Hey, let me know when you feel the burning embers of love finally fading—I'd like to try carpentry."

• •

Benjamin's literary criticism was too unusual and too uncompromising to win a large audience. But his admirers included some of the best living German writers, among them Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Bertolt Brecht. By 1930, Benjamin was confident enough to announce that his life's ambition was to "be considered the foremost critic of German literature."

It is not as a literary critic that Benjamin has been most influential, however, but as a pioneering cultural critic, one of the first writers to see all the products of civilization as worthy of analysis. This is the principle that guides his most famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," now a canonical text in art history, film studies, and related fields. In it Benjamin argues that, traditionally, a painting or sculpture was endowed with something he calls "aura," deriving from a recognition of its absolute uniqueness. That is why thousands of people line up every day for a quick, obscured glimpse of the Mona Lisa: not just to see it but to be in its quasi-sacred presence. In the age of technology, Benjamin perceived, this uniqueness is diluted by the ready availability of reproductions, which makes it possible to see a work of art without ever having seen the original. Furthermore, in the twentieth century's characteristic art forms, photography and film, there is no such thing as an original.

Surprisingly, Benjamin welcomed the idea of art without aura. He reasoned that aura was a kind of aristocratic mystery, and that its disappearance should herald a new, more democratic art: "The social significance of film, even—and especially—in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic side: the liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage." This rhetoric, with its enthusiasm for "destruction" and "liquidation," sounds distinctly odd coming from Benjamin. How, the reader wonders, did the great champion of Proust and Kafka end up decrying uniqueness and originality? How could the man who compared "In Search of Lost Time" to the Sistine Chapel ceiling also believe that "contemplative immersion" in a work of art was "a breeding ground for asocial behavior"?

The answer lies in Benjamin's exceedingly awkward embrace of Marxism. Like many other intellectuals of the time, he came to feel that only Communism could save Europe from war, depression, and Fascism. He visited the Soviet Union in 1926, and clung to the hope that Communism would provide better for writers than capitalism had managed to do. Benjamin's personal circumstances only reinforced this judgment. Literary journalism, never a lucrative career, was an almost heroically futile one in Weimar Germany. By 1931, Benjamin confessed that "material circumstances . . . have made my existence—with no property and no steady income—a paradox, in view of which even I sometimes fall into a stupor of amazement." And when Hitler seized power, Benjamin lost what remained of his livelihood. In March, 1933, he fled Germany for France, never to return. For the rest of his life, he lived on the brink of destitution. A subsidy provided by the Institute for Social Research, itself in exile from its original base, in Frankfurt, helped him scrape by. "My Communism," Benjamin said, "is a drastic, not infertile expression of the fact that the present intellectual industry finds it impossible to make room for my thinking, just as the present economic order finds it impossible to accommodate my life."

Benjamin's Marxist turn was welcomed by friends like Brecht, who regretted only that he hadn't gone far enough. Scholem, on the other hand, kept up a stream of reproaches in his letters from Palestine, thinking it nothing more than a fashionable disguise: "There is a disconcerting alienation and disjuncture between your true and alleged way of thinking." And he was infuriated by Benjamin's refusal to acknowledge how far his idiosyncratic understanding of Communism deviated from Party orthodoxy. "The complete certainty I have about what would happen to your writing if it occurred to

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Dissident, *by Nell Freudenberger (Ecco; $25.95).* This beguiling first novel centers on a Chinese performance artist and former political prisoner, who travels to Los Angeles to accept a teaching fellowship at a prestigious girls' school. His hosts are a well-off family whose matriarch, Cece Travers, is trapped in a loveless marriage with Gordon, a psychiatrist obsessed with tracing his genealogy back to "the crossing ancestor." A large cast of secondary characters includes Gordon's sister Joan, an accomplished but discontented novelist who stays skinny "by worrying," and his charming but irresponsible brother Phil, who is single-mindedly in love with Cece. Freudenberger demonstrates great talent for capturing the subtleties of cross-cultural and intergenerational relationships, as the dissident's struggles with his past and with his art intersect with Cece's unravelling.

The Keep, *by Jennifer Egan (Knopf; $23.95).* This neo-gothic tale conjures a wicked form of therapy for BlackBerry-addicted urbanites. Egan sends Danny, her twitchy protagonist, on a trip from Manhattan to a crumbling Eastern European castle that is too remote for cell phones, television signals, even roads. Danny's mind, previously weighed down with useless information, takes flight, and he soon becomes unsure whether an alluring baroness he meets on the castle grounds is real or a figment. Egan's clever scenario presents Danny's mental liberation as both thrilling and dangerous—imagination is the ultimate drug, she suggests—and the novel luxuriates in Wilkie Collins-style atmospherics. But Egan spoils things with an unsavory framing device: Danny's story, we learn, has been written by a convict in a jail cell. The juxtaposition perversely suggests that prison is an even better place to unclutter your brain and summon a good yarn.

The Conquest of Nature, *by David Blackbourn (Norton; $29.95).* A contemporary German who visited his country in 1750, Blackbourn writes, would not recognize much of the scenery: modern fields and farms were marshland, and even the rivers, speckled with sandbars and islands, would have flowed in different courses. Blackbourn explains the social and scientific ideas behind the impressive schemes that "rationalized" the German environment, provides lively portraits of the engineers and politicians involved, and traces the sometimes unintended consequences. The nineteenth-century "rectification" of the Rhine (the work on one stretch between Basel and Worms shortened the length of the river by a quarter and removed more than two thousand islands) reduced flooding and increased arable land, but it also destroyed populations of shad and salmon. Blackbourn argues that the "conquest of nature" has been "all too closely linked to the conquest of others"; the Nazi plan to "reclaim" the Pripet marshes, in Poland, was tied to an image of their Slavic inhabitants as primitive "swamp-dwellers."

Andy Warhol Screen Tests, *by Callie Angell (Whitney Museum / Harry Abrams; $60).* Between 1964 and 1966, Andy Warhol posed nearly five hundred hangers-on, Factory denizens, drag queens, socialites, critics, curators, art collectors, and poets in front of a movie camera for three-minute "screen tests": silent, black-and-white portraits shot mostly in closeup. This catalogue raisonné provides a comprehensive identification of participants, who ranged from the famous (Susan Sontag, Bob Dylan) to the unknown. Although the frame enlargements can't capture the arresting dramatic tension of the films themselves—how long can the subjects maintain their pose?—Angell provides a level of biographical detail that verges on the novelistic, weaving a web of acquaintance, collaboration, and random encounter that amounts to a portrait of an era.

you to present it within the Communist Party is quite depressing," Scholem wrote.

Benjamin never did join the Party, though he agonized over it, just as he continually postponed his often declared plans to learn Hebrew and move to Palestine. But his limited and private adherence to Marxist principles had significant effects on his work—effects that tended to bear out Scholem's pessimism. "The Work of Art" could not have been written without Benjamin's newfound interest in the material conditions of cultural production. Yet his masochistic insistence on putting his work at the service of the class struggle also accounts for the forced belligerence and brutalism of that essay.

The most significant casualty of Benjamin's Marxism was "The Arcades Project," which today enjoys a reputation as one of the most famous books never written. It was the white whale of Benjamin's last years, a magnum opus of stupendous scope and originality that he found himself perpetually unable to finish. The *Passagenwerk*, as Benjamin referred to it, took its name from the *passages*, or arcades, that adorned Paris in the age of Baudelaire. These were glass-covered promenades set aside for shopping and strolling, which helped to give the city its reputation as a paradise for flâneurs. In the arcades of nineteenth-century Paris, Benjamin believed he had found the omphalos of the modern city, with its erotic anonymity, its phantasmagoria of fashions, its mixture of banality and enchantment.

The *passages* appealed to him, above all, because by his own day they were already extinct, made obsolete by the department store. This gave them the charm that Benjamin found in everything discarded and superseded, all the detritus on which civilization imprints its deepest secrets. "To someone looking through piles of old letters," he wrote, "a stamp that has long been out of circulation on a torn envelope often says more than a reading of dozens of pages." In just this way, Benjamin dreamed of using the arcades to write the hidden history of the city he called, in one essay, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century." He initially meant his arcades essay to be brief, allusive, and literary—"a fairy-play," he called it in 1928. "In any case," he assured Scholem, "it is a project that will just take a few weeks."

What transformed the essay of 1928 into the thousand-page midden of notes, fragments, and quotations that Benjamin left behind at his death, and that was published in 1999 under the title "The Arcades Project"? Any answer would have to include Benjamin's constant tendency to procrastinate; the disordered conditions of his life in the nineteen-thirties, which made sustained research difficult; and the inherently elusive nature of what he was trying to accomplish. Above all, however, what kept him from completing the project was his Marxism. In the late thirties, when he returned to it in earnest, he was determined to recast his analysis of nineteenth-century Paris in the language of dialectical materialism. It was in support of this project that the Institute for Social Research granted Benjamin a subsidy, expecting a brilliant example of Marxist cultural criticism.

But when Benjamin started to put "The Arcades Project" in something like publishable form, sending Theodor Adorno an essay titled "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," he was in for a shock. Although he was eager to embrace Marxist terminology, his use of it proved far too clumsy for a subtle theorist like Adorno. Instead of sharpening his vision of Paris, Marxism had settled over it like a fog, reducing Benjamin to crude clichés. (For instance, he interpreted Baudelaire's great poem about drunkenness, "The Ragpickers' Wine," as a response to the wine tax.) In a devastating letter, Adorno said that, by using "materialist categories," Benjamin had "denied yourself your boldest and most productive thoughts in a kind of precensorship." Adorno's judgment echoed Scholem's: Benjamin's Marxist vocabulary had betrayed his true insights.

This rejection, coming from a representative of Benjamin's last remaining sponsor, was a terrible blow. The timing made it even worse: he had worked through the fall of 1938 to finish the essay, believing that war could break out at any moment. "I was in a race against the war," he told Adorno, who was then living in New York, "and in spite of all my choking fear, I felt a feeling of triumph on the day I wrapped up . . . before the end of the world (the fragility of a manuscript!)." Now he was being told that the triumph was illusory, that the Arcades Project could not be written on the terms he proposed. Even if Benjamin had lived long enough, it is doubtful that he could have completed it. The intellectual and ideological basis of the work was in ruins.

In any case, history was not to give him the chance. Despite his friends' attempts to persuade him to emigrate to England or America, Benjamin was still in Paris in the summer of 1940, when the evil he had fled in Berlin caught up with him. The fall of France set the stage for a secular martyrdom that is a large part of his legend. The exact details are disputed, but it seems that, on September 26, 1940, Benjamin was part of a group of refugees trying to cross the Franco-Spanish border at Port Bou. But the Spanish border guards, perhaps out of deference to the Gestapo, did not honor their visas and turned them back. In despair and exhaustion, Benjamin took an overdose of morphine. The next morning, the guards relented, and the rest of the party escaped over the border. Only Benjamin, buried in the cemetery at Port Bou, remained as an exemplary victim—a reproach to a Europe intent on murdering its Jews, its radicals, and its best minds.

Where does hashish fit into this parable of persecuted genius? A reader who turns to "On Hashish" for a clear answer may be disappointed. Like a small-scale version of "The Arcades Project," it is the placeholder for a book he could never finish, a ruin occupying the site where he planned a monument, and, as such, it has to be carefully interpreted. This is entirely fitting, since Benjamin himself believed that "all human knowledge, if it can be justified, must take on no other form than that of interpretation."

The most common kind of interpretation, of course, is reading. So deeply ingrained is our association of the two that reading provides a metaphor for many activities that have nothing to do with written texts: the fortune-teller "reads" palms, the astrologer "reads" the stars. The intellectual quest that defined Benjamin's work—at times, it seems, the dare that he set himself—was to find out how much of the world could be "read" in this way. In "The Arcades Project," he made lengthy catalogues of ephemera—advertising posters, shop-window displays, clothing fashions—commenting, "Whoever understands how to read these semaphores would know in advance not only about new currents in the arts but also about new legal codes, wars, and revolutions."

The suspicion that everything in the world carries a hidden message seems to have come to Benjamin at a very young age. "Berlin Childhood Around 1900" is organized as a series of vignettes, each devoted to a thing or a place from his childhood: "The Telephone," "The Sock," "At the Corner of Steglitzer and Genthiner." The result is an eerily depopulated memoir, in which Benjamin's parents are mute presences, and friends are almost entirely absent. Benjamin told Scholem that the project contained "the most precise portrait I shall ever be able to give of myself," and yet it is a portrait in which the sitter never appears, his place taken by the objects that surround him. The effect is not just to make Benjamin seem like a lonely, wary child, though he undoubtedly was. Rather, if Benjamin luxuriates in memories of solitude, sleepiness, and sickness, it is because these unguarded states allowed him to communicate most intimately with the objects around him. "Everything in the courtyard became a sign or hint to me," he writes in the section titled "Loggias." "Many were the messages embedded in the skirmishing of the green roller blinds drawn up high, and many the ominous dispatches that I prudently left unopened in the rattling of the roll-up shutters that came thundering down at dusk."

Benjamin always hoped to turn his powers of reading to even more tempting and obscure kinds of signs—astrology fascinated him—and his willingness to indulge such ideas hints at the metaphysical, even mystical inspiration that is at the heart of all his work, especially his understanding of language. This affinity for the mystical was evident to Scholem, who described Benjamin's work as "an often puzzling juxtaposition of the two modes of thought, the metaphysical-theological and the materialistic," but it is not easy for modern readers to embrace. The theological side of Benjamin's thought remained hidden, during his lifetime and long afterward, in part because he chose to hide it. He never published the seminal 1916 essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," which explicitly set forth his mystical vision of language, or later writings that show its continued hold on his imagination. Only with the publication of the "Selected Writings" has it been possible for English readers to grasp the crucial fact that the "metaphysical-theological" element of Benjamin's thought was older and more profound than the "materialistic" element.

Benjamin's essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" states, "There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is the nature of each one to communicate its mental contents." Everything in the world—stars, faces, animals, landscapes—has a meaning, and Benjamin accepts that this implies the existence of a cosmic author. "God," he declares, "made things knowable in their names." Of course, secular reason holds that human languages are purely conventional, but Benjamin would not countenance the idea that words are arbitrary: "It is no longer conceivable, as the bourgeois view of language maintains, that the word has an accidental relation to its object." Instead, he holds that every human language is really a failed and garbled translation of a divine language that speaks in things: "It is the translation of the language of things into that of man."

The vision of language that Benjamin advances here is moving precisely because it is beyond logical proof, and because it expresses so eloquently his longing for meaning in a world that usually presents itself as mere chaos. This longing drew him, slowly and equivocally, to hashish. In a hashish trance, he hoped, it would be possible to understand the language of things more directly than in ordinary life—to experience a universe suffused with meaning.

By the time Benjamin tried drugs, he had been reading and wondering about them for years, and when the moment finally came it proved to be a letdown, at least in the philosophical sense. This is not to say that Benjamin did not experience, and enjoy, all the usual effects. He felt mellow. "Boundless goodwill. Falling away of neurotic-obsessive anxiety complexes," he noted during his first attempt. He saw weird visions, such as "a long gallery of suits of armor with no one in them. No heads, but only flames playing around the neck openings." He even got the munchies: "I had been suddenly unable to still the pangs of hunger that overwhelmed me late one night in my room. It seemed advisable to buy a bar of chocolate."

But what Benjamin called "the great hope, desire, yearning to reach—in a state of intoxication—the new, the untouched" remained elusive. When the effects of the drugs wore off, so did the feeling of "having suddenly penetrated, with their help, that most hidden, generally most inaccessible world of surfaces." All that remained was the cryptic comments and gestures recorded in the protocols, the ludicrous corpses of what had seemed vital insights. In a session on April 18, 1931, Fritz Fränkel, a doctor who administered the drug to Benjamin, noted, "Arm and index finger are raised high in the air, without support. The raising of the arm is 'the birth of the kingdom of Armenia.' " During another trance, Benjamin was very excited to have come up with the phrase "*Wellen schwappen—Wappen schwellen*" ("Waves splash—armorial bearings swell"), claiming that the rhyming words held the clue to a deep structural connection between waves and the designs used in heraldry. "The subject holds forth in learned fashion," Fränkel noted. " '*Quod in imaginibus, est in lingua.*' " Fränkel may have known the meaning of the Latin phrase—"Insofar as it is in images, it is in language"—but he could not have recognized how crucial the notion was to Benjamin's thought, or how tremendously significant the nonsense phrase must have appeared to him. Under the influence of hashish, he felt that names and things belonged together, that a rhyme had revealed a reality.

The tragedy, or perhaps the comedy, was that this insight, the crown of Benjamin's philosophical labor, could not survive the trance that fathered it. In the cold light of the morning after, *Wellen schwappen—Wappen schwellen* is a meaningless jingle, and the raising of an arm has no perceptible connection to the kingdom of Armenia. "What we are on the verge of talking about seems infinitely alluring," Benjamin wrote resignedly. "We stretch out our arms full of love, eager to embrace what we have in mind. Scarcely have we touched it, however, than it disillusions us completely. The object of our attention suddenly fades at the touch of language." Hashish, like an evil genie in a fairy tale, granted Benjamin's wish, but guaranteed that he couldn't enjoy it.

What makes "On Hashish" an important book is that Benjamin's drug experiments not only were a failure in themselves but also shifted the ground beneath his other work in a way that he never fully acknowledged. The allure of his thought lies in his imagination of a perfected world, in which objects would be redeemed—to use one of his favorite words—from their imprisoning silence. Borrowing from the Jewish tradition, Benjamin sometimes imagined this redemption as messianic; later in his career, he often cast it in Marxist terms, seeing redemption as revolution. He clung to these hopes more and more passionately the more terrifying the world around him became. The last sentence of his last major essay, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"—written in 1940, when Nazism seemed unstoppable—insists that even at the darkest hour redemption remains possible, that every second is "the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter."

Hashish, by granting a vision of this redemption in such a compromised and transient form, forces us to confront the likelihood that it was never anything more than a fantasy. If Benjamin discovered a mystic language in his hashish trance, it is because he so fervently wanted to discover it. And something similar holds true for all his messianic speculations. The beguiling complexity of his work, built out of profound insights into language, thought, art, and society, makes it tempting to ignore the difficulty of actually dwelling inside it. After all, if the world is not a text because it does not have an author, then Benjamin is not an interpreter but a poet, creating meanings rather than perceiving them. Ultimately, his strange, beautiful works are best read as fragments of a great poem—the poem of a longing that no world, and Benjamin's least of all, could possibly satisfy. ♦

DANCING

WORLD STAGE

Israeli dance at Lincoln Center.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Israel is a young country, in an emergency. One might therefore expect from its dance companies a certain straightforwardness, a willingness to put on shows about what life is like and how we should feel about it. But in the three Israeli troupes that appeared at the Lincoln Center Festival last month—Batsheva Dance Company, Emanuel Gat Dance, and Yasmeen Godder and the Bloody Bench Players—what we saw was the opposite. Collage form, reflexiveness (representations about representation), attacks on the fourth wall, invasions of the audience: name a post-Brechtian challenge to traditional theatre, and that's what these people brought us. Such strategies have not vanished from American dance, but, since their high tide in the nineteen-sixties, they have receded. In Europe, however, the quarrel with illusionism—"What do you *mean*, I should let the audience suspend disbelief?"—is still going on, and so it is, apparently, in Israel.

Batsheva, founded in 1964, is Israel's foremost dance company. In 1990, it was taken over by Ohad Naharin, who was born in Israel and raised on a kibbutz but got most of his dance training in New York. The fate of the Jews has never been distant from his work, but over the years that subject has melded with other concerns: comedy, pure dance, theatrical pizzazz. His 2003 "Anaphaza" opened with a stage-wide semicircle of dancers, in black hats, davening spasmodically on folding chairs—a coup de théâtre, and very funny. Last year, in a studio in Brooklyn, he showed a piece, "Mamootot," also from 2003, that was sown with images of violence, but in an eerie, surrealist manner. The dancers' bodies were powdered white, and they wore costumes that looked like something out of Watteau. At one point, a dancer stripped naked and smiled at us conspiratorially. Then the whole company went around the studio, taking the hands of the spectators in the first row and gazing into their eyes at length. I got the guy who had stripped. It was unnerving, believe me, and I'm not sure how much it had to do with the boundaries of the Jewish state. I think it was about the boundaries of theatre.

Eran Shanny and Maya Weinberg in Yasmeen Godder's "Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder." Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

Similarly, Naharin's "Telophaza," which Batsheva performed at the Lincoln Center Festival. The L.C.F., like most dance festivals seeking to amuse summer audiences, favors multimedia work, and "Telophaza" filled the bill. A specialty of Naharin's is mass movement: large groups of dancers performing highly energized, highly repetitive steps in unison. That's

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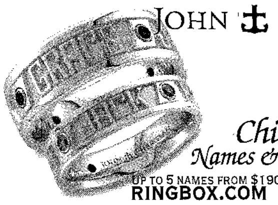

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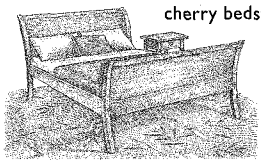

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how "Telophaza" started, with thirty or forty dancers, in a grid, bending over, placing their hands on the floor, and then bobbing up and down, to a heavy beat, for a long time. After about fifteen seconds, the bodies ceased to be bodies, and became one large pulsation. This was quite a sight. Later, the choreography got a little more complex, with two or three synchronized groups working in counterpoint, but the excitement was still like that of a military parade—strong, immediate, elementary.

Too elementary, perhaps, for Naharin's taste, because over the dance he constructed an elaborate video show. Again and again, while the ensemble was doing its drills, a few stray dancers, far upstage, were being recorded by closed-circuit cameras, which then projected their faces onto four huge video screens hung from the back wall. "You're enjoying those calisthenics onstage?" Naharin seemed to be asking. "Well, here's something else to think about." But the faces didn't really give us anything to think about. They were just a distraction. Soon, we were subjected to another discombobulation. Over the audio system came the voice of a woman who introduced herself as Rachel and began giving us movement instructions. "Put your hand on the side of your face and think about what you do for a living," she said. "Cross your arms and think of your money in the bank." Amazingly, most of the audience obeyed. But this, too, was apparently not enough to make Naharin feel that his dance was interesting. And so, at the end of the piece, in the middle of yet another rousing mass maneuver, he placed a near-naked man and woman, locked in a pained embrace, on the floor amid the ensemble. At first, you could barely see the couple on the stage—they were lost among the dancers' legs—but you could see them on the video screens. And what were the spectators to think about this last-minute note of trouble, particularly since, a minute before, Rachel had told them to get up out of their seats and dance? There they were, jiggling in place, having fun at the Lincoln Center Festival, when suddenly they were confronted by a video closeup of the woman's twisted body and anguished face. I heard some nervous giggling, but then Naharin broke the tension by ending the piece. The audience gave it a standing ovation. They were forced to—Rachel hadn't told them to sit down.

"Telophaza" had its première last fall, and Naharin can't be blamed for not knowing that when he brought it to New York his country would be on the brink of war. Still, it was strange, while we were all chewing our fingernails over the situation in the Middle East, to see Israel's most celebrated dance troupe put on a show that consisted of a seemingly unstructured series of kinetic thrills peppered with a few attempts to *épater le bourgeois*. Kinetic thrills are not to be sniffed at— they are the material of dance. Also, Naharin's company is wonderful, and in the past he has supplied it with serious pieces. But this was not one of them, and, in context, it seemed even shallower.

The same cannot be said of Yasmeen Godder's "Strawberry Cream and Gunpowder," from 2004. Its subject is war, or, as Godder explained at a Q. & A. after her first L.C.F. performance, the way the mind responds to representations of war—above all, to press photographs. Soon, Godder said, we become inured to such images—"indifferent," as she unflinchingly put it. Her aim, in "Strawberry Cream," was to examine that process and also to show what might be the process, for dancers, of representing such a process.

That's a lot of processes, and they were clearest at the opening of the piece, where the company's seven dancers repeatedly froze in grief-of-war poses: a man pointing a gun, a woman wailing. These were the press photographs. But a freeze can last only so long. Eventually, the dancers began to move, to enact the war, and then the epistemological inquiry began to crumble. When you watch a seemingly lifeless man get hoisted upside down into the air, with his shirt in his face and his sad belly showing, it's hard to conduct a meta-analysis. So Godder challenged grief in other ways. She combined it with sex; she mixed it with pop. At one point, a chorus of women lamenting over a body brought their moans into harmony and rhythm. Starting as the Trojan women, they became the Raelettes. There was much knowing laughter in this piece.

It was desperate laughter, though. I don't know if it was Godder's intention, in showing us these cheap transformations of the horrors of war, to fight her way back to real horror, but that's what she did. I've never seen a more violent dance. It's not just that the performers "shot" one another and "died." Godder found altogether new ways to insult the body. Dancers poked their fingers into their eyes; they dragged one another by the teeth. Two of them "ate" a dead body, like starving dogs. All this was done, over seventy minutes, without intermission, in a kind of frenzy. I was surprised that Godder and one of the other dancers, Iris Erez, were able, after the show, to come out for the Q. & A. By rights, they should have been taken out on stretchers.

There was plenty wrong with "Strawberry Cream." Seventy minutes was way too long. Also, like "Telophaza," the piece didn't have much of a shape. It went on and on, and then it stopped. It had a marvellous finale, though. Five dancers exited, laughing, through a door at the back of the stage. That, ostensibly, was the end. The five reappeared and took their curtain call. But "Strawberry Cream" had seven dancers. While the five exited and reappeared and bowed and smiled, a man and a woman remained at the front of the stage, he "dead," she cradling him, crawling on top of him, shaking him, trying to rouse him—a piercing scene. Once the five others left for good, however, the grieving woman did, too. She just got up and walked out. The dead man sat up and watched her go, and then the theatre went dark. There was the story of "Strawberry Cream": disaster versus forgetfulness.

Neither Naharin nor Godder did much with music. "Telophaza"'s taped score was a medley of rock and electronic music, used, it seemed, just to supply a beat. In "Strawberry Cream," we got a live guitarist, but he plucked his instrument only now and then. Most of the time, he rattled things into the mike to mimic the sounds of strafing and bombing. Emanuel Gat, on the other hand, was trained as a musician—he came to dance only in his twenties—and for him, as he said in the Q. & A. after his show (the L.C.F. has lots of Q. & A.s, to help the general audience), "It's always the music first." Both the pieces he brought to the L.C.F. were set to famous old scores, "Winter Voyage" to three songs from Schubert's "Winterreise," "The Rite of Spring" to you-know-what. But both were abstract dances, which ignored the stories told by the music.

The flouting of great music is a well-worn stratagem of modernist dance. Usually, the intent is ironical; the choreographer is giving the finger to Old World verities. It's possible that Gat's "Rite of Spring" was created in that spirit. To Stravinsky's thundering thirty-minute score, with its lurid libretto—the stamping tribe, the sacrifice of the virgin—the company of five danced salsa, pretty much from beginning to end. Was this an act of defiance? I'm not sure. Mostly, it was just boring. But "Winter Voyage" was something else. In this piece, a duet for Gat and another man, Roy Assaf, the departures from the score were even more extreme. Not only did the dance take no account of Schubert's doleful lyrics; it ignored his rhythms, his tempos, even the beginnings and ends of the songs. When a song finished, the dance didn't; it continued in silence until, maybe a minute later, another song started up, in mid-dance.

The dance was extremely powerful, though. Gat and Assaf, both with shaved heads and wearing long gray tunics—they looked like monks—navigated the stage, in unison, for the most part, their faces blank, unreadable. At the same time, the movement was freighted: full of sudden reversals, sharp attack, tense determination. Much of the tension, I think, came simply from the fact that the two men were dancing in unison. Unlike Naharin's drills, the choreography of "Winter Voyage" was complicated, with long phrases. For the two men to perform it together, side by side, in utter synchrony, was very hard, and that effort created a kind of emotional weather—some story about being together, staying together. I'm not saying this was a love dance; the men never touched. But there was something going on between them, and, in a dance, that is enough. In concert with the Schubert, it was more than enough. As the honeyed songs poured out over the steely dance, both elements became more striking, more themselves. In the Q. & A., Gat said he was always bewildered when people told him that he was choreographing against the music. What he was trying to do, he explained, was have a "conversation" with the music. He succeeded in "Winter Voyage," and, if he failed in "The Rite of Spring," that's not stopping him from tackling the musical canon. This summer, in France, he unveiled a piece set to Mozart's "Requiem." I hope he brings it to New York. ♦

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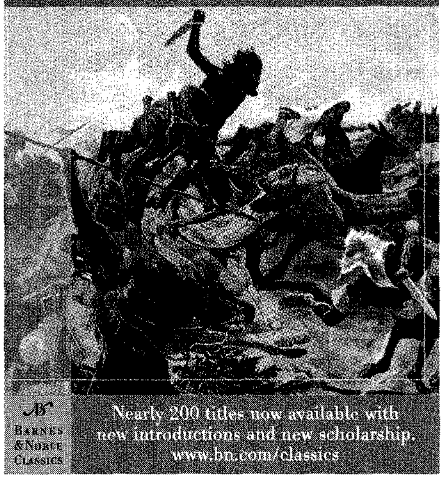

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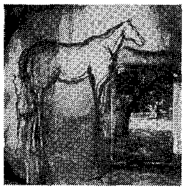

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MUSICAL EVENTS

WHAT NEXT?

A trio of new American operas.

BY ALEX ROSS

July was New American Opera Month in the purple hills of upstate New York and western Massachusetts. You could hardly drive your Smart car from the lesbian bed-and-breakfast to the organic farm stand without running over an adaptation of a literary property. Stephen Hartke's "The Greater Good" made its début at the Glimmerglass Opera, in Cooperstown. The Lake George Opera, in Saratoga Springs, presented Ned Rorem's "Our Town," which had its première in Indiana earlier this year. Elliott Carter's opera "What Next?" (1999) belatedly had its first American staging, at Tanglewood. Back in New York, Elliot Goldenthal's "Grendel" was the centerpiece of the Lincoln Center Festival, in a Julie Taymor extravaganza. These performances, all well attended, came at the end of a musical season that brought John Adams's "Doctor Atomic" to the San Francisco Opera, Tobias Picker's "An American Tragedy" to the Met, and Lowell Liebermann's "Miss Lonelyhearts" to Juilliard.

Are any of these new operas towering masterworks that will alter the course of music history while winning the hearts of millions? People have been asking that loaded question of American opera for a hundred years, and the way they phrase it almost demands a negative answer. Better to ask whether a new work is strong enough to hold the stage. If it does, it has a future, and the masterpiece-sorting can be done by later generations. "The Greater Good," "Our Town," and "Grendel" passed this test: lustily, wistfully, and by a hair.

Eric Owens's richly colored voice cut through the tumult of the "Grendel" score.

LARA TOMLIN

Hartke's "The Greater Good" is a tightly constructed, vividly imagined piece that may mark the emergence of a major opera composer. The excellent libretto, by Philip Littell, is based on Maupassant's story "Boule de Suif," which tells of the misadventures of a menagerie of bourgeois and aristocratic types who are travelling by coach in the middle of the Franco-Prussian War. A Prussian commandant stops the coach and lets them know that they can proceed only if Boule de Suif, a bighearted, big-boned prostitute who is on board, services his needs. She patriotically refuses. The others play elaborate psychological games to make her give in. They are greater whores than she. The challenge of this scathing little tale is that not a lot actually happens. Hartke seizes control with a subtle riot of sprung rhythms, colliding tunes, jazzy rave-ups, onomatopoeia (cat lovers will want a forthcoming Naxos recording if only for the Comtesse de Breville's mewling, chirruping aria, "I miss my cat"), musical in-jokes (listen for the would-be-transcendent "Rosenkavalier" trio that never gets off the ground), and, at the end, a delicately shattering anthem of despair. Hartke is celebrated for his orchestral music, which mixes Stravinskyan neoclassicism, minimalism, jazz, and Balinese gamelan. The dazzle of his orchestration was no surprise; the sizzle of his theatre sense was big news.

The melancholy Americana of Thornton Wilder's play "Our Town" has long fascinated American composers. Aaron Copland, who wrote music for the 1940 film adaptation, wanted to make an opera out of it, but Wilder did not coöperate. Ned Rorem, who has written only one other evening-length opera in his eighty-two years, eventually received permission from the playwright's estate. The drama plays to his strengths. Its mundane scenes of all-American life—baseball, drunkenness, gossip, marriage—elicit from Rorem the clean-lined, crisp-figured style that typified American music before the Cold War, and to which he has stayed uncompromisingly true. The unsettling transformation of the third act, in which we see the world through the eyes of the dead, makes him go deeper; at times, the music becomes uncharacteristically turbulent and grand. (Rorem has always prided himself on his Francophile restraint.) Wilder's ghosts remind us that we never appreciate the transient glories of daily existence until it is too late. The very fabric of the score—its luminous orchestration, its pearly vocal lines, its gently pulsing rhythms, its celestially circling song of young love—evokes the mundane beauty that we overlook.

J. D. McClatchy, who sleekly adapted "Our Town" for Rorem, is the librettist of the moment; somehow, he also found time to write "Miss Lonelyhearts" for Liebermann (unfortunately, not a success), and to collaborate with Taymor on "Grendel." The original source for the latter is John Gardner's sardonic, poetic 1971 novel, a postmodern masterpiece in which the monster whom Beowulf slew strikes back with a tell-all memoir. The New York State Theatre was packed with spectators who were eager to see what new wonders Taymor had wrought, and they were not cheated: her staging included a decadent, stage-spanning Dragon, figures dancing in mid-air in strobe light, decomposing puppet beasts and beastly machines, and comically preening heroes who appeared to have studied the production numbers in "Showgirls" for choreographic inspiration. Goldenthal kept pace with the images, deploying a meta-Wagnerian, bass-heavy orchestration, semi-improvised episodes with a hard-rock tinge, thumping bacchanalia in the manner of Carl Orff, and spells of post-minimalist lyricism along the lines of recent John Adams. The trouble was that he merely kept pace; the score followed the action rather than drove it. Still, it had a certain mythic weight, and the show was a wow.

Glimmerglass, Lake George, and the Lincoln Center Festival all fielded mostly young, mostly unknown casts for their productions, proving that celebrity singers aren't needed to attract audiences to new opera. True, Denyce Graves played the Dragon in "Grendel" (in woefully ragged voice), but the main attraction was the little-known but very fast-rising bass Eric Owens, in the title role. His hefty, tonally focussed, richly colored voice cut through the tumult of Goldenthal's score, and his vital, naturalistic acting gave heart to a high-tech spectacle. Steven Sloane authoritatively marshalled the orchestra. In "Our Town," which was directed by Nelson Sheeley and conducted by Mark Flint, the vocal standout was Sarah Paige Hagstrom, passionately engaged as Emily. At Glimmerglass, where David Schweizer put together a sharply humorous staging of "The Greater Good" and Stewart Robertson led a spot-on orchestral performance, Caroline Worra created a radiant and heartbreaking Boule de Suif.

At the Tanglewood festival, everyone was dumbstruck by the work ethic of James Levine. Sidelined in the spring with a rotator-cuff injury, the grand Pooh-Bah of the Met and the Boston Symphony has shed several dozen pounds and, if possible, seems more unstoppably dynamic than before. One weekend, he conducted three different all-Mozart programs, including all of "Don Giovanni." Another weekend, he led, on consecutive nights, Schoenberg's "Gurre-Lieder" and Strauss's "Elektra," which require orchestras of a hundred and forty and a hundred and fifteen players, respectively. I caught Levine's last Tanglewood feat of the summer, in which he dissolved the difficulties of Carter's "What Next?" The piece appeared on a program of short operas, alongside Hindemith's "There and Back" and Stravinsky's "Mavra." The director Doug Fitch deftly tied the three works together with Dali-meets-Warhol imagery. The singers were Tanglewood students; the gleaming soprano voices of Chanel Marie Wood and Kiera Duffy, and the commanding contralto of Christin-Marie Hill, stood out.

"What Next?" is an anti-opera that pointedly avoids conventional narrative. Paul Griffiths's libretto describes, in knotty, jokey, Samuel Beckett-like style, the aftermath of a highway accident. The characters may or may not be dead, and are trying to figure out what world they belong to. Carter's hyper-complex musical language is fit for the subject, effortlessly summoning a hectic, rush-hour atmosphere. The various characters are assigned governing intervals—perfect fifths, minor and major seconds, tritones, and so on—and if two notes are insufficient to define a personality, that may be the point; at the border of death, the precious illusion of individuality disintegrates. This is the same disenchanting wisdom that Rorem imparts in the final act of "Our Town." The overlap is ironic, because, for fifty years, Rorem and Carter have been considered polar opposites in American music, the one defending tonality and the other rejecting it. In their late operas, they are seeing humanity with almost the same eyes, as a frantic dance to a misheard tune. ♦

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Danny Shanahan, must be received by Sunday, August 20th. Finalists in the July 31st contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 4th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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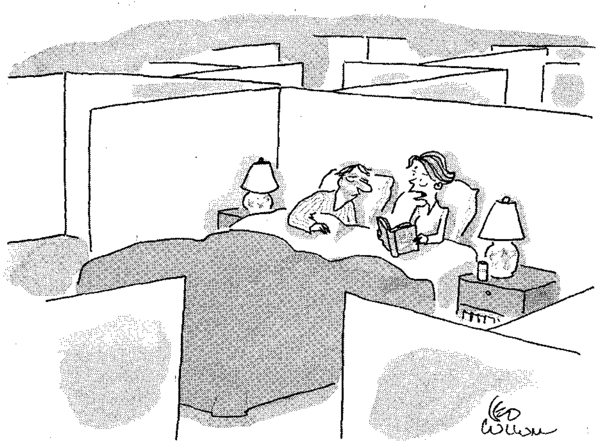
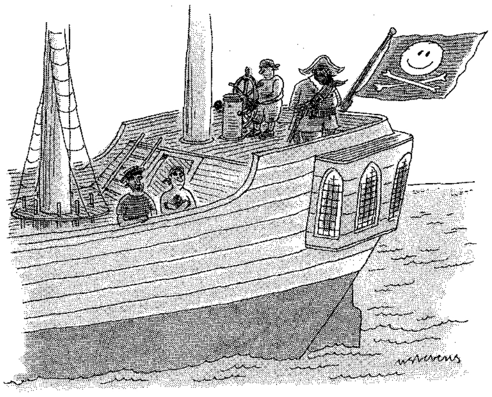


"Sooner or later, you're going to have to learn your way to the bathroom yourself."
Noel Armstrong, Maple Shade, N.J.



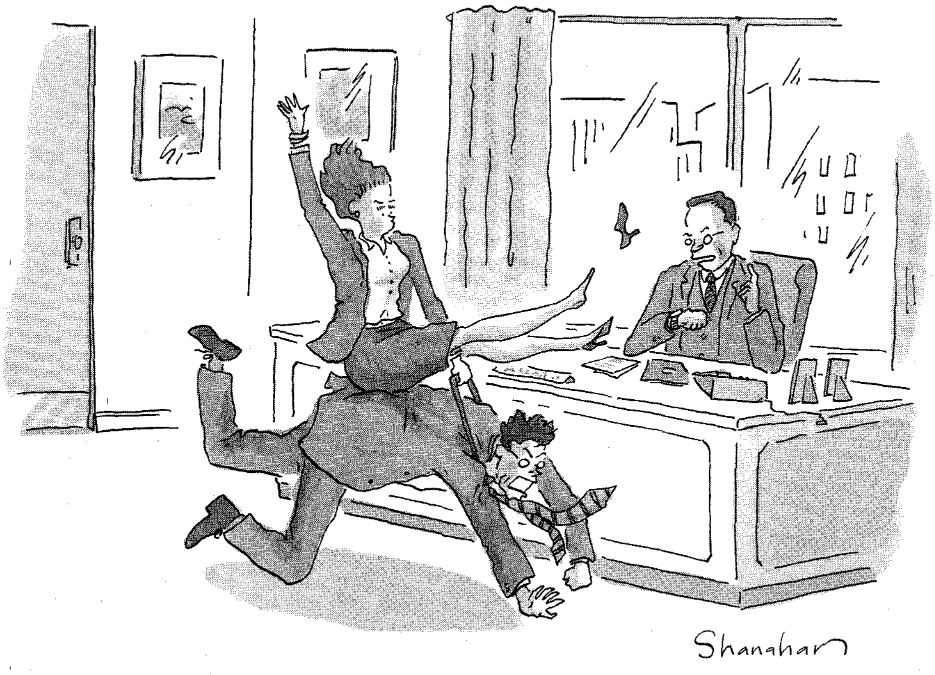
THE FINALISTS

"I'd mutiny, but I'm having such a nice day."
Dallas Schrems, Norman, Okla.

"Aye, and he replaced walking the plank with time out."
Thomas Roth, Atlanta, Ga.

"No, we don't get much booty, but we meet a lot of nice people."
John Cassidy, Westbury, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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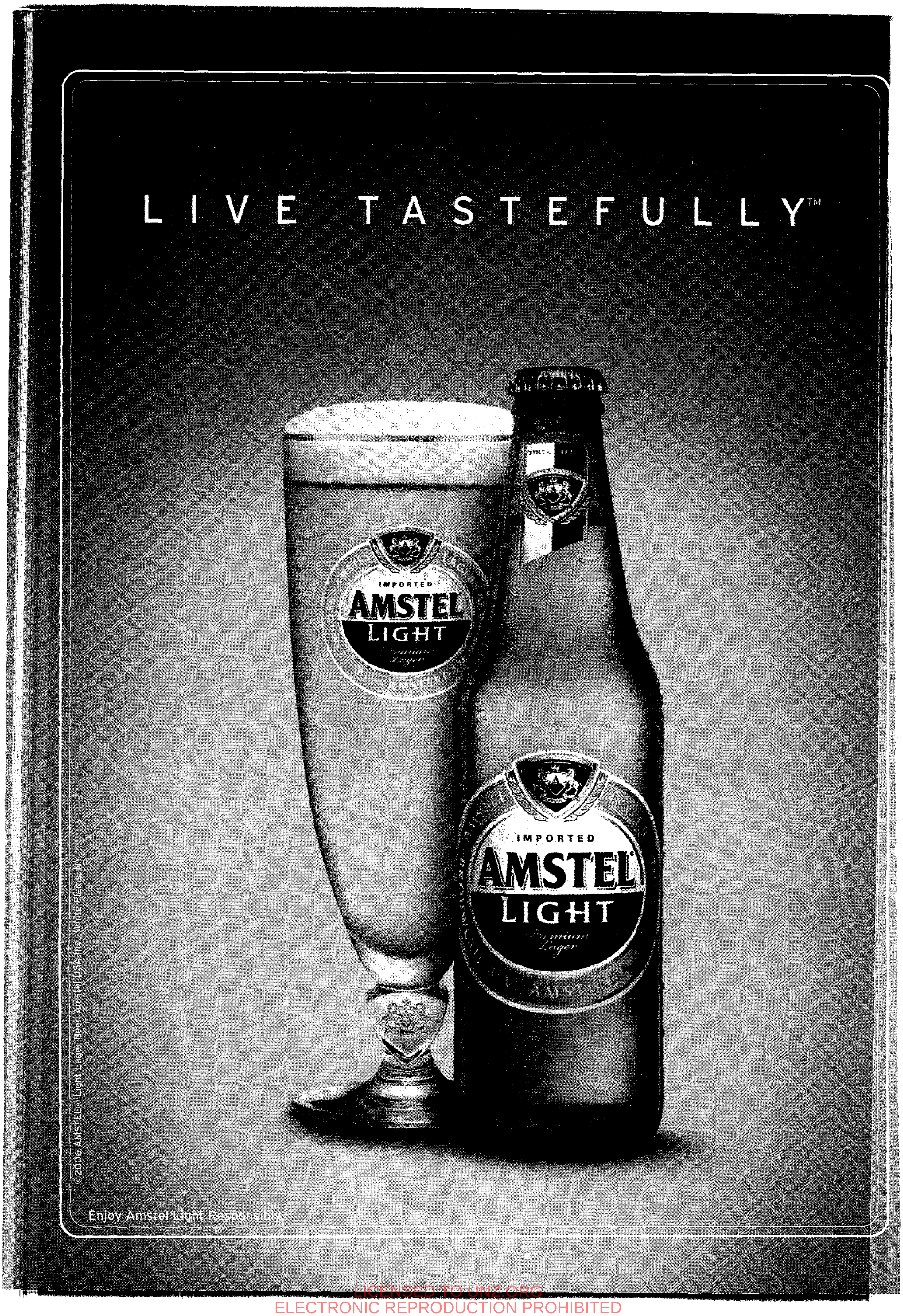
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